

Our Self-Created Dilemma

— Henry Vosburgh —



Many popular expressions describe the occasional situation where no alternative of outcomes has a favorable result. These are times when we find ourselves “between a rock and hard place” or faced with a “Catch-22,” a situation in which contradictory standards create an inevitable violation. We have all experienced a circumstance when we are left “with no place to go,” “on the horns of a dilemma,” or in a condition described in the computer world as “deadlock.”

A lesser-used phrase to describe such difficulties is Morton’s Fork. This comes from English history. John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury under the rule of Henry VII, reasoned the taxing of all subjects of the realm “by arguing the obviously rich could afford to pay and the obviously poor were living frugally and thus had savings and could pay, too” (Online Etymology Dictionary). It’s no wonder this was called a “fork,” for the only choice an Englishman had was to decide upon which fiscal tine he would be stuck.

We all have these circumstances in life from time to time. But it’s when we have created these situations ourselves we realize only too late we just “painted ourselves into a corner.” We throw our hands in the air and ask, “What was I thinking?” Most of the time, we weren’t! We went about what seemed to be business as usual, and before we knew it, we created our own dilemma. Being unable to reverse course, we have to choose which fork prong to be skewered upon.

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THE SELF-CREATED DILEMMA

In my role as a church planter, I often encounter what can be called a self-created dilemma in our efforts to plant churches - our own Morton’s Fork. Here’s the way it happens.

Prong 1

- A challenge is offered to churches about advancing their ministries through church extension / planting new churches.
- The challenge is well-received because church planting is biblical, church planting is needed, and generally speaking a passion for church planting exists. Furthermore, because we always have time and resources for what we really want to do, I am finding that these churches do have resources to offer as well. As a planter, when this is noted, I get really excited!

- However, what is next communicated by these churches is a condition: they will engage in such an effort when and only when they can meet and approve the man that is committed to lead the church plant. This checks my excitement, for harvest laborers are few and need to be prayed into the harvest. So, my challenge when facing this stipulation is to find a qualified man who will accept the responsibility to lead in planting a new church.

Prong 2

- A challenge is offered to men who will rise up to meet the need for leaders to

plant churches. The spiritual needs are obvious, and churches are looking for men that will answer the call.

- The challenge is well-received because church planting is on the minds of a growing number of leaders today. For numerous reasons, I am finding more receptive hearts in many ministers about planting churches than what I first encountered when entering this work just nineteen years ago. So in the course of recruiting, when I sense a man is open to planting, I get excited again!
- However, what is next communicated by the typical potential recruit is a condition: he will engage the planting ministry when and only when he can enlist the commitment of the resources of a church or network of churches to provide security. He is only willing if he can be assured of financial and relational security. Again, my excitement gets checked. This is when the self-created dilemma surfaces.

We have on the one hand churches willing to engage as a network with their resources if they can see the planter. And on the other hand, we have a planter willing to engage if he can see the church network with their resources. The equation they propose is simple:

Church planter + Church/network with resources = New Church Planted

We have the elements identified, but the equation breaks down when both have to see commitment from the other before the sum can be realized. Hence the self-created dilemma; because of the shortfall of commitment on both parts, planting is hindered. The unfortunate result is that the needs which exist continue to go unmet. We who are commanded to go forward into the world hinder our progress because we have in effect tied our own shoelaces together.

HOW TO ADDRESS THIS DILEMMA

This self-created dilemma needs to be addressed. And thankfully, there is a solution to this problem. The

more effective way to address this dilemma is to prevent it from happening at all. That is, leaders and networks should approach church planting differently. The change in approach is a simple one, yet it is pivotal and will have a completely different outcome. Instead of a “lose-lose situation,” it will start producing a “win-win” one.

The necessary change to prevent this dilemma is the intentional removal of demands on the parts of both the church(es) and the potential planters. We need to change from the posture of having to “see” the other operating to a posture of believing God for the provision of everything we need to fulfill His commission. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, “for we walk by faith and not by sight.” This change moves us from walking by sight to walking by faith in church planting.

Churches burdened with the need for planting new churches must put their feet in the Jordan and simply start the planting process, knowing

that doing so is the will of God - by virtue of the Great Commission and by virtue of biblical example of the early church in Acts. The church is to advance into this world with the message of the Gospel. And everywhere we go, we are to bring forth the assembly of the saints to continue that proclamation. The advancing ministry in Acts did not wait until a man from outside the fellowship was found to do that work. The church in faith sent its own witnesses, and God provided whatever was needed from whatever source He deemed fitting.

Potential leaders burdened about the need for planting churches also must put their feet in the Jordan, knowing that as they seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, all the things necessary for survival will be increased to them. This includes food, clothing, shelter, and all other needed resources (i.e. the security dynamics). In Acts, when men were led by the Spirit to pursue ministry, they went forth in faith. And again, God supplied all their need.

RELATING TO VISION AMERICA

In light of our stated agenda for Vision America, we would do well to make sure that we begin rightly. This means not withholding commitment until what we can see is verified. Doing so creates our own dilemma and prevents our advance of ministry. Rather, both churches and planters need to step forward in faith. When God sees our collective faith in Him for the common pursuit of planting churches, He will bring all of the necessary elements together for a fruitful outcome. Doing so will prevent dilemmas, our own Morton's Fork, and freely allows our advance toward the fulfillment of God's will in planting churches.