

Wherewithal

I serve on the Young Life committee that supports the ministry's mission in our neck of the woods. I'm passionate about Young Life leaders going where teens are and building meaningful relationships with them on their turf. All the while, introducing them to Jesus and helping them grow as apprentices of Him.

At a recent board meeting Hannah, one of our staff, was overcome with emotion as she began her staff report. Hannah was returning from a summer sabbatical (which YL wisely insists its staff leaders take) where she had spent time "thinking with God" about her life's callings and longings. She was renewed in her clarity about her calling of spending time with college-age ministry leaders helping them see what God is up to for themselves. She further equips them for outreach impact on our high school and middle school campuses. She didn't put it like this, but what she said in that part of her report to the board was, "I want to be here! I want to do this! I want to be doing this with all of you!"

Her emotion that day was rooted in her renewed confidence and gratitude for the privilege of serving in this way. Her contribution in the room that day was mostly intangible, but contagious. Its "naming" was implicit, but its impact was explicitly felt. What Hannah exemplified is an essential resource for ministry effectiveness that I fail to see often discussed or acknowledged. We need to talk about it. We all have it or lack it to varying degrees in various areas of our lives. I have experienced its impact on organizational ministry while working alongside kingdom leaders for more than four decades. This opinion piece is intended to bring increased attention to this intangible quality. In hopes of capturing what it is and nurturing it further, I'd like to attempt to bring attention to it in the examples below. Highlighting it as a criterion, perhaps we can call it out when it is missing and minimize the damage done on kingdom activity.

What am I talking about that Hannah modeled and missional communities need from its leaders? **Wherewithal.** Wherewithal is an old English word that means the means, resources, or ability needed to accomplish something. In my use of the word here, I'm talking specifically about motivation, not knowledge or financial resources. I'm intending to name "resolve." Not grit, resilience, nor hard work, as important as those qualities are. But I'm putting the spotlight on "want to."

The etymology of the word enthusiasm is "en-theos," meaning "in God." Perhaps we can think about this way. God has a clarity about His purposes. God is motivated regarding His role in creation. God has trinitarian capacity for redemptive activity among His angelic and human moral agents. Put simply, God wants to be doing what He is doing, with those who He is doing it with, and in the universe where God wants to be doing it. God doesn't want to be somewhere else, doing something else, with someone else. It's not missed on me that is a weird way of talking about it. Yet I think it has merit for our conversation.

When wherewithal is lacking, the outcomes are not pretty. The organization suffers. The leader suffers. I've suffered watching them suffer. In one case, it was so heartbreaking to see the

organizational chaos being created with wherewithal being one of the elements missing, I turned my head from watching and stepped away before the church eventually split.

When the pastor doesn't want to be here, we implicitly know it. When nonprofit directors want to be somewhere else, the air seems stale. They may not know where they want to be. Nor do know where they want to be. Regardless, it's not here. Their ministry toolbox lacks the wherewithal of motivational energy to fulfill the kingdom assignment in front of them. Or perhaps the ministry leader wants to be here, but they don't want to be doing this. They may not know what it is they want to be doing, but they know it's not this. Not in this way.

Let me share with you two composite stories of my experiences with this dis-ease. The names and details have been altered for the sake of anonymity.

Grayson wasn't happy with his current staff role. He wasn't bashful about sharing that information with his staff peers, though not with the volunteers of the nonprofit where he was employed. His murmuring and disgruntled demeanor became an agenda item for the executive team and all five members agreed that something needed to be done. When I met Grayson, something I had done before, we were finally able to uncover his deepest longing. With my sincere support for his best interests, he expressed he wanted to attend seminary, earn a degree, and become a certified biblical counselor.

"Awesome," I said. "Let's get that done. How about the theological school in Charlotte? They have a master's level program in Biblical Counseling. Want to take a look?" I asked excitedly.

"No. I can't," he answered dejectedly as his voice trailed off. "I can't do that to my family. My wife is happily employed here. My kids have friends in our home church. I can't do that."

My next question seemed innocent enough, but I will never forget Grayson's response. "Have you asked them? Have you talked to Anna and the boys about what you feel called to do?" I inquired.

"No, and I wouldn't. I wouldn't do that to them," he stated emphatically. That conversation began the inevitable... a severance package and a forced transition with all the relational hurt you might imagine.

Here's another: "The Well" was a pillar in the community when it came to evangelical campus ministries at the local university. Lauren was hired as the executive director after her predecessor retired. Lauren had the credentials and experience to continue this institution's longevity. She was skilled in fund development, good with the students, and her acumen for board dynamics was stellar. But there was one problem. She doesn't want to live here. She wants to be back in Austin. She misses the outdoor recreation, the live music scene, and the tech savvy vibe. She wants to be back there helping "keep Austin weird." She's vocal about it. Her students and staff can sense her restlessness. They give her local swag as a passive-aggressive expression of their disdain for her UT Longhorn apparel.

In the illustrations above, there's a deficit of wherewithal. They either want to be somewhere else, making their contribution with someone else, or doing a different mission entirely. Or, perhaps, a combination of all three. When we experience this happening in our part of the planet, it needs to be acknowledged. It must not be left unaddressed. Of course, patience and time are required. But, leaving the lack of wherewithal unnamed and neglected is a slow poison to institutional health.

I'm hoping this writing is tempered with empathy, not coming across as too harsh to those who are lacking wherewithal or those who are working with someone experiencing it. I've navigated my own seasons of confusion regarding my usefulness, my role, expectations, or the toll on family or finances. These seasons needed resources that included retreats, experiments, sabbaticals, hard conversations, discerning practices, modified job descriptions, and resignation. But staying stuck cannot be permanent. Feeling trapped is a slow death for everybody. A risk is needed. Or, to quote a popular Switchfoot tune, I "Dare You to Move."

Welcome to the fallout
Welcome to resistance
The tension is here
Between who you are and who you could be
Between how it is and how it should be
I dare you to move.¹

What move do you need to make? What move do you need to encourage someone to make? We need your "wherewithal" to fulfill our God-given mission. I need "wherewithal" to experience God's delight in fulfilling His calling in this and every season of ministry life.

When wherewithal is present, it's so inspiring. Thank you, Hannah, for reminding me of the power of wherewithal. May God help those of us who may lack it, who need to be reminded, those who are leading those who are lacking it, and those who are in need of the courage to make a change and embrace a new season. God give us wisdom. Lord, hear our prayer.

Consider this...

Are you tired from having done the work you once dreamt of doing?
Are you feeling overwhelmed by chaos you once set as a goal?
Will you be remembered for a life you created on purpose?
Express gratitude. Pace yourself. Don't quit. Keep the faith.

Do you **really** want to be somewhere else? Doing something else? With someone(s) else?
Discern that. Seek wisdom. Take courage. Make a move.

¹ Jonathan Mark Foreman. Dare You to Move lyrics © Reservoir Media Music, Penny Farthing Music, Meadowgreen Music Co., Sugar Pete Songs, Chillin Cholla Music