



Episode 65: The Price of Presence is Pain

Featuring: Mingo Palacios & Gil Acevedo & Jeremy Del Rio

<https://thepdpodcast.com>

Transcript:

Mingo Palacios: [00:10](#)

Hey everybody, thanks for tuning into the PD Podcast. You know, from time to time we get the luxury of traveling around the country and actually bringing our podcast to conferences and events that are happening all over the country. This conversation took place at Thrive Conference. It's an incredible one hosted by Bayside Church. Enjoy the episode.

Gil Acevedo: [00:34](#)

What up family? Gil Acevedo here. We are with the PD Podcast and we're doing a mash up with the UIWI. That's right, Urban Youth Workers Institute podcast, by the way.

Mingo Palacios:	<u>00:41</u>	For the first time hearing the ultra combo.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>00:44</u>	Some like mashed potatoes. We like mash beans. Okay, so beans from all over the world. We're doing this.
Mingo Palacios:	<u>00:44</u>	With cheese.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>00:50</u>	Yeah with cheese. We're going to have a great conversation with our good friend Jeremy. Jeremy, how you doing today my man?
Jeremy Del Rio:	<u>00:54</u>	I'm doing great man. Thanks so much for inviting me.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>00:54</u>	And where are you from?
Jeremy Del Rio:	<u>01:00</u>	So I am with Thrive Collective in New York City. We create hope and opportunity through arts and mentoring in about 100 public schools around the city.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>01:07</u>	Man, I am so stoked for this conversation. And to my right, we have Mr. Mingo.
Mingo Palacios:	<u>01:10</u>	Yes. Purpose Driven Church aka Saddleback Church. Glad to be here and a part of the conversation. Honored to be inside of the Urban Youth Workers. The entire ecosystem all brought together in a conference. Pretty amazing to hear and see who's come to the table both by way of workshop platform speakers and what we say, the blacktop right where all of this leadership capital just wandering around. It's amazing. And today we got Jeremy wandering into the airstream, so it's good.

- Gil Acevedo: [01:41](#) It's really good. Jeremy, can you dive in with us here and tell the viewers and listeners what is Thrive Collective? You gave a cool brief description, but dive into that for us.
- Jeremy Del Rio: [01:52](#) So we work in public schools around New York City in two primary ways. First we're a matchmaker. We connect other organizations, many of them faith based, to public schools. Those groups provide a range of wraparound supports for students. And then we supplement the work our partners do with arts and mentoring programs. So our arts, we teach murals, music and media production and then we run school based mentoring programs. It's all project based learning. So in the end, the kids work over the course of about a semester collaboratively to produce something beautiful.
- Mingo Palacios: [02:29](#) How in the world did that? Can I go to school again so I can be a part of your program? You have a very unassuming origin for this. And earlier we were talking about the Ministry of presence and how this plays a critical role in this. Tell me, what are those key experiences in your own life that have led you to launch and lead Thrive Collective.
- Jeremy Del Rio: [03:03](#) So I am a preacher's kid. Back in 1982, my parents started a ministry called Abounding Grace Ministries. They were born and raised in New York. All of my grandparents were immigrants to New York, but my parents felt called first and foremost, as evangelists to their own city. And their motivation came from

Romans 5:20, "Where sin abounds, grace abounds more." So back then, their theory on how to experience abounding grace was to ask the NYPD where the worst drug spots were in New York, believing that if they were in the presence of drugs, they'd find a lot of sin and by extension, God's abounding grace. And so that's the genesis. I was eight years old, the oldest of three boys.

Mingo Palacios: [03:03](#)

That's wild dude. You say it so nonchalant.

Gil Acevedo: [03:54](#)

They kind of believe that if they went to where things were bad, they could be a light.

Jeremy Del Rio: [04:00](#)

Believe it or not, that's the way it works. Right? When the darkness is most overwhelming, that's where it shines brightest. Yep. So that's how it started. In 1992, we planted a church. We didn't know that's what it was called, 'church planting' as a buzzword didn't exist yet. In '94, they drafted me to start the youth ministry at the church. I was 19. I had dodged the draft for two years.

Mingo Palacios: [04:28](#)

You know what they call that in ministry? They call that voluntold.

Jeremy Del Rio: [04:28](#)

Exactly.

Mingo Palacios: [04:28](#)

Voluntold.

Jeremy Del Rio: [04:34](#)

That was it. I resisted for two years, but they wore me down and then as an undergrad started the youth group at the church. And in '96 we started a youth

center in a housing project down the street from our church. And that youth center served students from the public K-8 school across the street. At any given year, 80 to 90 percent of our kids came from that one school and so that's really where it all started. I was very much passionate about justice and public policy and community development so I went to law school to be an advocate for this kind of work in the communities we were serving. And so that's the genesis of where it all began and there's a lot of evolution, but that's how it started.

Mingo Palacios: [05:19](#)

It's interesting, justice, law, lawyer law school. That's not the typical trajectory for somebody who was voluntold by their mom and dad pastors. So wait, how does art make its way into your storyline?

Jeremy Del Rio: [05:38](#)

So in the youth center that we started, the origin story of that is I was the oldest cofounder of 13 Kids at 21. We started a youth center with no money, no paid staff, no equipment, no anything really. But God gave us a space and we had a bunch of kids with a lot of heart but not much else. And from that group of kids, we basically surveyed the room to see what we all loved and what we had some capacity to do and that became the genesis of all our programming. And so there were people in that room that loved to dance or loved music. And so that's how it started for myself. I've been called to repressed artists. I like to say my art is the people and pulling the people together. But the transition point began in 2005 when my younger brother said to me, "Jeremy, I'm tired that when kids

finish our program, so many of them can't get a good job." And I said, "So you're tired of it. So am I." He said, "If I could teach math in the school across the street, I bet fewer of them will hate it and more of them will get good enough at it to get a good job. And it was one of those moments that changed how we thought about community engagement. And particularly with that school, we were very content prior to that to be good neighbors. And when situations arose, we'd show up, but there was no intentionality until then. He started the process. He ended up getting hired the next year to teach math. That year, that summer, we got a grant to do a beautification project and I knew some artists, so we talked about doing a school yard mural experience, and it was phenomenal. It was a complete one off, but it was a phenomenal experience within three or four years, the school was an A rated school and the principal credited the math department with leading the turnaround-

Mingo Palacios: [05:38](#)

Get out of here!

Jeremy Del Rio: [07:58](#)

But they could trace statistically the improvements to the year after we had completed the mural. And so that was the beginning. There's a lot that happened after that. But that was the pivot point where we started connecting some dots, thinking a little more strategically about what presence in the building meant as opposed to being content to be a good neighbor.

Mingo Palacios: [08:22](#) That is what stood out to me the most where he was like, "Being a good neighbor wasn't good enough." I just think the challenge, you know, it's easy for most of us just to like our stuff is together next to that which is not, but the story about your brother going by conviction into the mess, that is a challenge I think all of us can adopt and examine self and say, "Am I living nice and neat just next to the mass hoping they're going to see me and wander to my side of the street, or is it my duty to go in?" Therein lies this phrase, the ministry of presence.

Jeremy Del Rio: [09:10](#) Yeah. It's the picture, the quintessential picture is Philippians chapter two. The creator, not believing creation to be something to hold on to, but becoming like creation and moving into the neighborhood. The way John tells the story, the word becoming flesh and blood and moving into the neighborhood, right? Jesus never invited us to his turf. He came to our turf and he was fully a part of the culture. You think, for example, why he didn't preach for 30 years when we go into a community, the evangelical impulses to preach, but by that definition He wasted 30 years of his life.

Mingo Palacios: [09:59](#) Nobody would say that exactly. No one would say that.

Jeremy Del Rio: [10:03](#) Because he was present, right? It was part of the community and out of that grew a credibility and an authenticity. So when he finally opened his mouth to preach as a rabbi at the age of 30, he could be taken seriously because he had been part of it. He

understood the cultural context and that I think is the invitation for us. That's what Thrive Collective ultimately is all about. It's how can we not only talk a good talk and have the rhetoric of compassion and justice and all this stuff, but how can we embody it?

- Mingo Palacios: [10:40](#) How can you shut your mouth and show up? That's the way I see it. Right?
- Jeremy Del Rio: [10:40](#) Absolutely.
- Gil Acevedo: [10:44](#) I love what you said there because I think, I think most churches would say that the responsibility of the church is to go and preach.
- Jeremy Del Rio: [10:53](#) Yeah, and I think the Bible would flatly disagree.
- Gil Acevedo: [10:56](#) Yeah and that's so good. That's so good.
- Mingo Palacios: [11:00](#) Tell me, what do you think it is that got this script twisted then? I mean, could we go down that pathway, just entertain this theory? Jeremy, I'm assuming you have a thought or two about it.
- Jeremy Del Rio: [11:00](#) Just a couple.
- Gil Acevedo: [11:16](#) A lifetime of thought.
- Jeremy Del Rio: [11:18](#) So there's a lot of great metaphors that Jesus used to describe his mission and why he was on earth. But if you look at them, the through line in all of it is the idea of the Kingdom of God on Earth as it is in heaven. When he declared his mission in Luke chapter four, it was not good news that results in an insurance policy

against hell. It was good news for the poor. It was freedom for prisoners. It was sight for the blind. It was a demonstrated a reality. It was not rhetorical flourish. And then when he said it and you think about what was happening in Luke four, he says it, and then on his way back to his seat before being seated, he said, "Today, this word is fulfilled in your midst." And the response from his home church was to want to throw him over a cliff. They drove them to the cliff in Nazareth to throw him over the edge. There's something about moving the message from an intellectual idea to a demonstrated realities that it's a 'prove it" moment. It's you prove that your actions and your lifestyle match your words. And when we're not prepared to do that, we have the safety of the status quo. But if we're about to make that kind of a statement, we're going to ruffle everybody's feathers. The metaphors he uses, there's one time that he talks about being born again. Just once and he's talking about it to a church leader, a Pharisee. And to the Pharisee he said, "You must be born again." He didn't say that to the sinner. To the sinner, He said, "Come follow me." And he said, "Come follow me and in that lifestyle, in that relationship, your life's going to be changed and the rest is going to take care of itself".

Mingo Palacios: [13:22](#)

There you will discover the connection between me and my father, the mission, the love of my father.

Gil Acevedo: [13:30](#)

Yeah because even you saying that where even when he did speak to the masses, he always turned to the 12 so that they would turn and choose others too. It's

kind of like with discipleship. It's discipleship. It's going, "How do we prove by investment in others and do it?"

Mingo Palacios: [13:49](#)

I was challenged when we were talking before we started recording this episode, that the Ministry of presence is also a ministry of pain a lot of times. It's throwing off the convenience of what you currently have access to and it's embracing the pain that is around you that you didn't get yourself into, but you know in order to shine light, you must enter darkness. That's happened to you recently in the expression of your father's choice to be president. Would you unpack that for our listeners because it hit me hard?

Jeremy Del Rio: [14:29](#)

So on the morning of September 11th, my dad was in midtown Manhattan hosting a guest from Texas actually having breakfast and somebody ran in the restaurant and said, "Put the TV on because a plane just hit the twin towers." And so he, like everybody stood, mesmerized and watched the second plane hit. And that triggered same impulse from 1982 to go where the need was greatest. He jumped on his motorcycle to go to ground zero. On his way, he remembered that a year prior, a pastor colleague of his suggested he buy a clerical collar for emergencies. My Dad is an unconventional pastor. He wears tank tops when he preaches. His arms are tatted up and he drives a Harley. So a clerical collar is not his usual garb, but he remembered it. He stopped home. That delay meant he arrived 10 minutes after the second collapse instead of being there as the

buildings came down. When he arrived, he had no idea the buildings had even fallen. He only saw the cloud. He thought it was smoke from fire, not dust from ash. But as he pulled up and got off his motorcycle, a rescue worker approached him and said, "Father, would you pray for these body parts?" He had a body bag with them. And so my dad, you know, that's not part of our traditional theology, but he prayed the best he could. And then when he was done, he rounded the corner and he saw the pile and the absence of the buildings, which by the way, he helped construct back in the seventies before he was in ministry. And so it hit him. My Dad is a very opinionated Puerto Rican, who always has a word.

Mingo Palacios: [14:29](#)

Hey, same as this guy dude.

Gil Acevedo: [16:25](#)

I'm half bro. I'm Mexirican bro. My mom's from the Bronx. I liked his family.

Jeremy Del Rio: [16:32](#)

So, he said it was the first time in his life he had no words. He had nothing to say but he was there for 18 hours and he realized that day the primacy of presence, that him being there spoke far greater than any sermon, which by the way, he didn't know what to say. But he didn't have to, and that was the point, he didn't have to have all the answers. He also recognized in that moment the value of humility and the actually putting on the collar because that site, that visual was a cue that God hadn't left despite the disaster, despite the tragedy that God was still present. So that's where it started. He spent the better

part of a year at Ground Zero for the next hundred days. He was there know 12 to 18 hours a day. On April ninth of this year, he was diagnosed with stage four thyroid cancer that came from his work at ground zero. And so we are very much kind of living with the price of presence and having to navigate that. On May 9th, so just a few days ago, he went in for six hours of surgery to remove the cancer. So he's in the hospital right now still in recovery. They think they got it all but it was an incredibly invasive procedure that's going to have a long road ahead.

Mingo Palacios: [18:05](#)

Jeremy, when you are the son of that kind of belief on display, I can't even imagine where you would say, "Glory to God" without having an equal side of you that says like, "God, how dare you?" I'm just listening to that and that's my response. How have you navigated that personally?

Jeremy Del Rio: [18:30](#)

It's one of those things, I don't have an easy answer for it. I don't even know that I have any answer, easy or hard, other than, this is what grace looks like. Grace to weather the storm. Grace to get through. As we've seen the response over the last month to the diagnosis, one of the things my parents always said is, "God keeps the books." The kind of ministry that they do is thankless on every level. And that has always been a struggle for my brothers and I to see them grind it out for that support because of the injustice of the brokenness of how we even do ministry, let alone sin. But anyway, as they've navigated it, to see the response and the way that

that's carried him through this moment, has been overwhelming. He's gotten thousands of notes and messages and prayers and people from around the world that are standing with him in this. I know that prepared him before he went in for surgery and it's definitely sustaining our family. And we don't know the outcome, it's like real time. So I can't tell you how the story's going to end but I know that in it, every one of us has been uplifted by the grace that gets you through the darkness.

Mingo Palacios: [20:09](#)

The price of presence. You know what stood out to me, Jeremy, that you said that your dad, it was the visual collar that represented the fact that God hadn't left. That scenario, that mess, that tragedy, that unexplainable moment. I think that's what art does. Yes. Art is the visual. It is the color. It's the collar that reminds us that God has not left.

Jeremy Del Rio: [20:39](#)

And that statement you just said perfectly reflects the truth of Genesis Chapter One. The foundational truth of scripture is not that God is Savior, Lord, Lover, Justice. He's creator.

Gil Acevedo: [20:55](#)

I love this guy! We're going to kick it, bro. We're going to kick it hard.

Jeremy Del Rio: [21:01](#)

Verse two, so he creates and then suddenly something happens, and theologically that's beyond my pay grade-

Mingo Palacios: [21:01](#)

You and me both.

Jeremy Del Rio:	21:07	<p>It's dark, it's empty, but the spirit hovered, he never left. He was present and then God said and created light. The ability to see creates the horizon, the ability to have vision for the future takes this dry land that already existed in the water that existed, rearranges it, and creates an environment for life, right? And then creates the metrics on day four of the sun and the moon and the ability to measure growth and progress. And then starts to populate this new environment with the ability to sustain life and vegetation and birds and fish and then creates us in his image and likeness. Tells us to do the same thing. Every instruction he gave to Adam and eve in the first three chapters is inherently creative. Naming the animals, being fruitful and multiplying. Being fully engaged and when we abdicate that responsibility, people can experience the foundational reality of a creative God.</p>
John:	21:07	<p>Yes. Yes.</p>
Gil Acevedo:	21:07	<p>John's mind is blown.</p>
Jeremy Del Rio:	21:07	<p>The whole idea of salvation-</p>
Mingo Palacios:	21:07	<p>The producer, who is like a ride or die artist also. Don't stop. Please don't stop.</p>
Jeremy Del Rio:	22:32	<p>Along the way, at every step, the end of day one, two, three, four. It's not complete from a human perspective, but at every stage it is good. It is good. It is good. It's a work in progress. It's not fully formed in the outset, but it is good because you're part of this creation, this regeneration, right? The renewal of all</p>

things. This is the invitation of the Gospel and when we abandoned that, because we're too busy being safe and the comfort of our building, we miss out on the truth of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is heaven.

Mingo Palacios: [23:10](#) When we assume salvation in self preservation.

Gil Acevedo: [23:10](#) Yes.

Mingo Palacios: [23:10](#) That's when we lose.

Gil Acevedo: [23:15](#) And we do nothing too, by the way, but you know what I mean, like we actually become complacent in how we view art, creativity, nature, other people. It's scary to think that it's easy for us to do that. You mentioned something, and all of it's a cost. You know what I mean? It's crazy to think like your Dad said at some point. And you shared a lot about your story and I love your vulnerability and honesty at some moment he said investing and reaching and living with and loving people is worth my life on earth.

Mingo Palacios: [23:55](#) In the name of Jesus.

Jeremy Del Rio: [23:55](#) Yeah.

Gil Acevedo: [23:58](#) I think that is something that unfortunately the church as a whole is not known for. We're not bashing the church as a whole, but we're saying that when you look at it-

Mingo Palacios: [23:58](#) When you see a radical example.

Gil Acevedo:	<u>24:11</u>	You're like, "Whoa." Like am I willing to say that I may get sick if I go. And it's not leaving the country. He didn't leave the country.
Mingo Palacios:	<u>24:11</u>	No, he left the coffee shop for a few blocks.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>24:23</u>	You know what I'm saying? I think this part really hit me, this would have impacted me, he went, there was an urgency about his view of life, of people and situations where he didn't hesitate going. And I want that.
Mingo Palacios:	<u>24:23</u>	The flinch reaction is to go.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>24:23</u>	Yeah. We must go.
Mingo Palacios:	<u>24:43</u>	Jeremy, our episode is already like 20 something minutes long and I do not want to cut it short. I just don't know how. Do you preach, Bro? Do you go church to church to church for our listeners? Is this something that you do on the regular?
Jeremy Del Rio:	<u>25:00</u>	I love to go and communicate and speak. I was a youth pastor for 10 years, so I preached.
Mingo Palacios:	<u>25:10</u>	Your youth kids, dude, can I be in your youth group? Jeremy? That's what I want to know.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>25:10</u>	Can you disciple me?
Mingo Palacios:	<u>25:17</u>	Jeremy, for people that want to follow along your orgs, like all of the Thrive Collective and if there's an opportunity to dial into your mentality more, how do they do that?

- Jeremy Del Rio: [25:37](#) ThriveCollective.org is our website. Social media is NYCthrive. So they're certainly welcome to follow along and engage. One thing that we set out when we started was to open source the work that we're doing.
- Mingo Palacios: [25:48](#) My two favorite words put together man.
- Gil Acevedo: [25:50](#) There are two guys in this room right now that would love to help.
- Jeremy Del Rio: [25:55](#) Freely we have received so freely we give to the extent that's possible. So online, everything we've learned, for example, about how to engage with schools we've put up there as much as we can. ThriveCollective.org/getstarted is a free get started guide for people that want to partner with schools. And we'd love to take it further.
- Mingo Palacios: [26:19](#) Yeah. Jeremy, I'm blown away at both the pastoral and the... obviously it sits inside of you the desire to reconcile through creativity is like evident. But yo, the lawyer in you sits very refined. And I dig that because most people here are like, "yeah, blah, blah, blah, blah." They just spew and you have to try to find the nuggets and you're like, "Hey, I'm going to put it right in the middle of the table and if you don't see it, that's your fault."
- Gil Acevedo: [26:57](#) And just to say, yeah, okay, we're at a conference. There's other believers and Christians. Jeremy, the respect I have for you and your knowledge of scripture that flows naturally off your tongue means

you've put your time in such a way that it's impacting and it's contagious.

Jeremy Del Rio: [26:57](#)

Thank you.

Gil Acevedo: [27:13](#)

I love God. I love the word, but you've let me on a personal level of like this, I want it to be that natural. Does that make sense?

Mingo Palacios: [27:13](#)

Yes.

Gil Acevedo: [27:27](#)

I saw you too and I know your body language. I hope the listeners and viewers, I hope as you hear this or see this. This man loves God's word.

Mingo Palacios: [27:34](#)

Yeah, that's a good one.

Gil Acevedo: [27:37](#)

And it stems from a father and a family that loves it too. And I think it's crazy how their investment in it, it's coming off you. It's so awesome.

Mingo Palacios: [27:46](#)

It's poured over like the beard of Aaron. That is just on you. Well, and I think to walk away to go, you know, the Ministry of presence is extremely sexy. But the price of presence is something everyone needs to reckon with.

Gil Acevedo: [28:04](#)

There's nothing greater than to lay down your life for a friend or a stranger. Right? I think about that. That means investment. People are worth investing in. It's worth going, right? It's worth responding. And dude, your family, you are a beautiful picture of that. Man. I've been so inspired today.

Jeremy Del Rio:	<u>28:20</u>	Thank you so much.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>28:20</u>	Thank you so much. Oh my gosh.
Mingo Palacios:	<u>28:22</u>	I feel like it's all of this.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>28:28</u>	Mingo, how can people connect with you as well, my man?
Mingo Palacios:	<u>28:31</u>	So if you want more of these kinds of conversations our podcast is out there, the PD cast. You can find it pd space cast on all channels, iTunes, blah, blah, blah. You can also go to thePDpodcast.com. Jeremy gave all of his credentials. Gill, you're the last one.
Gil Acevedo:	<u>28:50</u>	Oh Man. Gil Acevedo. So @gilrilla on Instagram. Hit me up. Chat it up. Let's create art together and let's impact the world.
Mingo Palacios:	<u>28:55</u>	To our listeners, tank you so much for listening. Jeremy, thank you for cracking your self and your story open, man. I prayed that our listeners are just sitting straight in shock and actually really examining what they say they do and are and what they're really willing to do and become. So, Jeremy, thank you. We appreciate you. To our listeners, we love you. Sorry you just got smacked in the face like that. We're in it in the moment with you. We love you. We'll see you later.
Mingo Palacios:	<u>29:28</u>	We hope today's insights left you feeling inspired and propelled towards your greatest potential. Thanks

again for joining us for another episode of The PD Podcast. Until next time.

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