



## Episode 100: Celebrating 100

**Featuring:** Mingo Palacios & Angie White & Robert Cortes

<https://thepodcast.com>

### Transcript:

Mingo Palacios:

Hey, everybody. Welcome to the PD Podcast. Mingo here. As always, giving you inside tips and tricks for practitioners all over the country concerning ministry, leadership, and just pastoral insight. Today's a special day. This is our 100<sup>th</sup> episode. Unbelievable.

Robert Cortes:

Unreal.

Mingo Palacios:

Of course, I've got Robert Cortes across the way from me, ride or die since Day 1, till the wheels fall off. Robert's been – we were just talking before hitting record, we've been on tour together. We've been in the RV that we lost in Florida at some point. Rest in peace, 36-foot Fleetwood Bounder. We've been in the Airstream together. We've done ministry that got us to this podcast, and we've been in ministry since this podcast together.

Robert Cortes:

Yep.

Mingo Palacios: It only seemed appropriate that Robert would be on the microphone with me as we're in the RebelFish studio, just recalling all the faithfulness that God has really displayed about Himself in each of our journeys.

Robert Cortes: Yeah, it's been a journey for sure.

Mingo Palacios: As we're recording, I don't know what time you're listening to this, but it's late for us. It's Saturday prep night for me. Tomorrow is a full Sunday, four services. It was too important not to get together and to celebrate and look backwards on some of the things that were major highlights over the last two years we've been running this podcast. It makes sense; 100 episodes, 50 episodes a year, roughly, give or take. We missed a few, but we've been pretty consistent.

One of the things that stands out to me is how much better we are when we share where we're going and what we're going through. I think we are seeing a shift in ministry culture.

I was just up at Hume Lake for the Youth Workers' Retreat. Shout out, John Tunger [sp], Hume Lake. They gather lead pastors, elders, youth workers, volunteers together. Churches come together for this 3 days of just raw retreat up in the Sequoia National Forest, and they bring a bunch of different speakers to the table to lead workshops.

I brought several people that have been on our podcast together, Stevie Moultrie and Vince Freeman, and I talked about how much better our city is because we have a new generation of church leaders that are leading with an open hand. They're meeting together and they're for one another. They're not in competition. They're sharing the best practices that are helping their church reach new people, and they're not holding it tight like a clipboard by a college coach in a football game where they're hoping you can't see the play that they're going to run next.

I think the spirit of collaboration has helped our church tremendously. Torrey Pines, this is our 13<sup>th</sup> month. We had some inclination of how we wanted to see Torrey Pines Church become healthier, and it's been

by the help of several lead pastors from our friendship circle and others who have been willing to come and share their best practice with us that have actually, I think, helped accelerate our health and accelerate our growth.

What are some of the things, Robert – this 100<sup>th</sup> episode is both reflective and perspective. We're going to look forward. As we're getting close to 2020, what are some of the things that you and Liz do as you pivot and posture your company – you think entrepreneurship, you think the same kind of leadership application applies – so that you guys appropriately measure where you've been and set goals for where you're going? What are some things you can give our listeners?

Robert Cortes:

Literally today we got back from an annual getaway that me and my wife take. We usually take 3 or 4 days and we decompress. We do no business. It's just purely fun stuff – biking, walking the beach, suntanning, pool activities, spa. Eating some great food you don't normally eat. [laughs] Watching some TV. Just really some time alone, away from where we work. That was the key, to not do this vision planning where we work. It gave us a fresh perspective.

We felt that we needed to go through that decompression and relaxing to get to a place where we could talk about 2020 and what life was going to look like, what were our goals. We had several really big goals that we didn't hit last year. We hit some of them, but some of them we didn't. So we were like 50/50, like “wow, we did really good here; we did really bad there.” We didn't even look at that. Totally forgot about that. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios:

[laughs] Totally negligent on this byline.

Robert Cortes:

Yeah. We just started realizing that sometimes it's better to be a little bit more conservative. My beautiful and loving wife, she is a go-getter. She can accomplish probably 10 times more than me in an hour than I can. I'm a slow processor/researcher. I just navigate strategy differently. We completely complement each other. We're opposites, but our

complementary strengths are so different that we complement and we can get a lot of stuff done.

I tend to be the pull back. She'll say, "Let's dream." I love dreaming. One of our things is we want to launch our own podcast that we've been talking about.

Mingo Palacios:

Totally.

Robert Cortes:

Jokingly, she types in "one million downloads." I'm thinking, honey? [laughs] I'll be happy – a record podcast, like break 100,000 are considered bad boys. I said, "I'd be happy with 1,000 in a year." But she dreams, and then I try to put a more conservative reality to it. But I love her dreaming because it actually propels us forward. She's more of a visionary than I am. I'm more of an executer/strategist, and then we just meet in the middle.

So we did a lot of prepping. We actually didn't do – and this is funny, because we went away to do our vision casting, and we only ended up doing our vision casting the last 3 hours of the trip.

Mingo Palacios:

Interesting. Was it because you felt like you needed a lot of rest to recuperate from a very difficult year or just a busy season? Or is that just the natural path – like you felt like you spent time resting, you waited for your bodies and conversations to like exhale, "now it's time to dream"?

Robert Cortes:

Yeah. We normally do two 8-hour sessions. We break it up into 4's and we do all this stuff. I told Liz, "I need another day." My brain was not there. She's like, "Okay." Which is really unusual, because she's like, "We can do this! We can do this now!" She was totally okay with it.

Then we were actually able to do 90% of the work in 3 hours. It normally would take us 16 hours. That said something to us, like wait a minute, maybe the rest is giving us the capacity to do the thinking.

Mingo Palacios:

The fuel, yeah. That's good. It reminds me – Rick talks about doing work wisely. He says the person who spends time sharpening the axe is actually going

to do the greater work. The more time you spend sharpening the axe, the more efficient you'll be at work, versus working with a dull axe, spending 2X, 3X, 4X the energy working with a dull instrument. Smart.

Robert Cortes:

Yeah, definitely sharpened our axe. And I'm so grateful that we did it. We're still not finished; we still have a couple loose ends to tie up today and tomorrow. Today we worked like another hour. Tomorrow might be 30 minutes. So total time might be 5 hours, tops.

Usually we argue. I would say "heated debates," because it's business. [laughs] She's very high energy, and I can be a bull in a china shop in terms of "I want what I want." It just worked out really well this time where we literally didn't have any of those spirited debates.

Mingo Palacios:

That's so good, because you guys are coming from a place of rest.

I love Aloha Church, man. They're just down the street from us, Trish and Dru Teves. They've been such a huge part of the formation of me as a leader, my wife certainly as a leader. We share office space.

That's one of the things that I'm really proud of: the last 13 months as a church, we've given lots of ministry away, or we've made space for ministries that are not our own as a declaration to say that we are partners in this city with churches down the street from us, churches across the city from us. We are for churches who are for Jesus and for the neighborhood.

I love the posture of their church. It's "we are a place where you can find rest." In a culture that really minimizes rest – you usually fall into your bed, dead tired, you peel yourself out of bed because you've got to get to the next thing. Man, I love having some close friends who remind us that rest leads to more productivity than you could ever imagine, versus drinking a bunch of coffee and energy drinks and just trying to plow through it.

Robert Cortes: Yeah, I got a lot out of thinking about rest. We decided that our goal for 2020, one of them, is to take 30 days off. Then we looked at 30 days off, and then we looked at another 30 days off in increments. We still haven't decided yet how the rest is going to look, but then we said, well, let's see what other people are doing. So Liz looked up other people that are doing similar stuff.

Mingo Palacios: Wise. Very wise.

Robert Cortes: They said a few companies are doing – which is crazy – smaller companies, agencies – 3 weeks on, 1 week off every month.

Mingo Palacios: Wow.

Robert Cortes: So you go from Monday to Friday, Monday to Friday, Monday to Friday. I mean, you still take off Sunday.

Mingo Palacios: Of course, or whatever your days off are.

Robert Cortes: And then the last week, you disappear. Sunday to Sunday, you're gone. Then I did the math, and if you do the math, it adds up to 3 months off. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: Holy cow. You'd think there's no way you'd be as productive working 9 months instead of 12 months, but here you've got some data that suggests people are healthier, they're more bought into the organization, they're doing more by way of – they're being more productive in that rhythm.

Robert Cortes: Yeah. Another thing that we found out that I want to do for 2020 is not to do everything with my brain. I need to do stuff with my hands. I remember Rick saying that how he rests is he gardens.

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, totally.

Robert Cortes: He gets dirty with his hands. I'm like, you know what? Every time I try to build something or fix something, even though I suck at it, I actually enjoy it. I'm like, "this is cool."

Mingo Palacios:

[laughs] Yeah, I can expand on that. If you're somebody who spends a lot of time let's say counseling, you're doing personnel work, you're working side by side with people or face-to-face with people, you're on the computer – they say if you work with your head, one of the great ways that you can find rest and a little bit of balance is by doing something with your hands. So go volunteer to put some manual labor hours in at your church, or start a garden. That's what Rick does. Pick up a hobby like woodworking or something like that. If you work with your mind, you need to balance by doing something with your hands.

And then vice versa; if you're somebody who's in the labor force and if you're constantly working with your hands – I'm thinking of John Allen, who is constantly building things. He's like a magician when it comes to what he can put together with his brains and his hands. Rest for John, a lot of times, is something that engages his mind, so going and seeing a movie or reading a book or listening to a podcast.

Those balances, hands and mind, are ways to give yourself some productive outcome after you rest. If you find yourself overloading in one, it's always good to be keen about how you can introduce the other into your rhythm.

I was thinking about the fact that after 100 episodes, we are not where we started, geographically or positionally. Actually, running this podcast at Episode 100, I could have never predicted when we started Episode 1 that we would be here. It's a two-year time period that we essentially got ourselves here.

For listeners, where you're at right now, you can't even fathom where God is going to have you in 24 months' time. It could be in the same church, but with totally new influence. It could be that you're having the best run of your life at your church, and in two years' time you're going to be in a totally different career.

I just spent dinner last night with my good friend, Chris Lupe, who arguably is one of the most creative

pastors I know. Has helped shape so many houses of faith when it comes to how to tell a compelling story that conveys the vision of the pastor and the vision of the church to people that are visiting or members. I had dinner with him last night; I haven't seen him in about a year and a half, right about when we started this whole project, and he's now the VP of a marketing company. I was like, "Whoa, did you ever imagine?" The conversation was rich and deep.

But nobody could've predicted two years ago, when we pulled together a couple of recorders in a yet-to-be tour RV that the other side of that, a milestone 100 episodes later, we'd be pastoring a church – and leading it. Robert, you and Liz are a part of the membership onboarding process at Torrey Pines Church now.

Robert Cortes:

Yeah, and we're proud of that.

Mingo Palacios:

Just wild, I think, to live with a posture of hands open. I definitely believe that the greatest service we can pay to leaders that God puts in proximity to us, whether that's staff or volunteers, is to assess who they are, understand the lid that lives in your leadership realm, and then help move those people beyond that lid.

I feel like that's what we did with Daniel Santos. Daniel's been on the podcast a bunch of times, and Daniel right now is in the process of becoming an employee for Saddleback. Two years ago, he would've never, ever believed or thought, being a part-time sound guy in a traditional service, that he would be now entertaining conversations about how to change the culture at a place like Saddleback through photography.

Robert Cortes:

Wow.

Mingo Palacios:

I looked at Daniel in my own world, and I certainly gave Daniel a run for his money when it came to being a creative, learning how to build teams, learning how to lead beyond your creativity. But I knew the lid that our church had. We at the time were at 350 people, and I know that kid can be a creator and a



creative for communities in the several thousands count. And I knew that I couldn't offer it to him. If he was going to wait for me or wait for the church, he would be waiting for years.

So for me to be able to say, "Daniel, I see this in you, and I think that you'd actually be better in this other camp, in this other ministry," that serves his purposes more than it serves our church. I think it represents a much greater capital 'C' Church. It builds Kingdom people, not castle dwellers.

Robert Cortes:

So you were seeing leaders through.

Mingo Palacios:

Seeing leaders through. It's your responsibility to help them move through, not because they're underperforming, but because they've got more potential than you can foster while you're where you're at. And that's exactly where I felt like I was, specifically with Daniel.

I'm really proud of that kid. I'm proud of that storyline. I hope that storyline inspires other leaders to not be an aquarium keeper – we've said this before on the podcast, that God calls us to be fishers of men, not keepers of aquariums. And if we see ourselves as fishers of men, part of that is sending people through and to the next greatest pasture.

We're talking about being shepherds. Shepherds need to keep an eye on the sheep as they graze because sheep are stupid. Not to say that volunteers are stupid, because they're not; they're so valuable. But sheep will graze until there is no more grass. They will start to eat the dirt, and when they eat the dirt, they get sick and they get infected and they die. If we think about how we keep a watchful eye on our volunteers, there are capacities that we have to be keen whether or not we can shepherd. We can't feel bad or misinterpret or falsely promote a better pasture that we have access to if we don't.

It's so valuable, I think, for pastors, for leaders of ministries – if you see somebody growing and going, and you're going, "I can't control or contain this person," commission them off so that they have a

great sense of belief coming from the leaders of the place they're leaving, and do a solid to that leader and call ahead to the other church or the other ministry and say, "Hey, I've got a guy who is too big for our ministry. He's coming through the ranks and he's not there yet, but he's definitely all-in. Would you embrace him?"

Robert Cortes:

He's hungry.

Mingo Palacios:

Yeah. "Would you embrace him, and would you wrap your arms around him, and would you do for him what we wish we could do for everybody?" That I think is going to convey a church that church-burnt and de-church people are going to take notice for.

We can't live in this competitive ministry landscape anymore. I think non-church people are too smart for that. They're going to experience and sense, and they're going to see a competitive spirit between houses of faith, and they're going to walk away because of the poor taste it's going to put in their mouth. We've got to be better stewards of a capital 'C' Church, in my opinion.

Robert Cortes:

So we have to transition better. Exit better.

Mingo Palacios:

Yeah, and I think we need to know the people well that are in our camp. I'll tell you, this has been my struggle, Robert. The church, 13 months last week – 7 days ago we celebrated our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a church, and it was a record weekend attendance-wise. 861 people, just for scope if you're in a church that's around the same size as us or maybe half the size of us or maybe five times the size of us. That's where Torrey Pines Church is now.

It's difficult for a staff of hired people to know everybody who is visiting or checking out your church. I think that's why it's so valuable to give leadership away, give the value prop of being a person who is trusted and known and reputable away, so that it doesn't sit with a few, but is distributed amongst many trusted, high-level volunteer leaders.

I want people to know less of me and more of you, ultimately, Robert. And yes, the most I want them to know God. That's the end trajectory for why church exists, so people will know God. But the people that God uses – yes, He can use a pastor, but whoever's coming and visiting our church, I'd much rather they meet another volunteer leader and say, "Ah, this is the economy of this church: many people laying hands onto and into this thing called Torrey Pines Church for many more people to be served." It's got to be more than the staff.

Robert Cortes: Well-said. Wow.

Mingo Palacios: I'm learning, dude.

Robert Cortes: From my perspective, I can see how someone moves on to something and you help see something that they can't see for themselves. Either when you meet them, you believe for them – you've said that in the past.

Mingo Palacios: Yeah.

Robert Cortes: But then taking another step, believing their potential somewhere else. It's almost like saying goodbye to someone you don't want to say goodbye to.

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, totally.

Robert Cortes: Then you look at it and I think you have to trust God with that, because someone else is going to step into that that may need it.

Mingo Palacios: Totally. Someone's going to step up and into a position that was maybe once paid, and you're going to get to let's say distribute what was one person's responsibility to 10 volunteers. That's good for the church. It might not feel great. It might hurt for the staff transition. But I think in Daniel's case, I love that Daniel was paid to take pictures, and upon his exit, he brought in four creatives to help backfill what he was managing alone.

That to me is the mark of a great leader – and the mark of really healthy ministry. It's not just a bunch of

– and this is what I love about Rick. One of the great staff meetings that I sat in with Rick while he was confessing what he thought were errors in building the Saddleback staff, he said, “I think we may have missed the mark when we hired the best of the best to do the work of the ministry. We gave jobs to people who were absolute specialists, professionals, people who are paid to be responsible for a need in the organization.”

He said, “The word” – ah, it’s going to escape me because my brain’s so tired – “The opposite of ‘professional’ is ‘amateur’.” Yes, I got it. Thanks for bearing with me.

The root of the word “amateur” is “amor,” and the word “amor” means “to love deeply.” Amateurs love it so much that they would do it without pay – and yet in our church culture or North American culture, we think of an amateur as somebody who’s not there yet or somebody who’s not skilled enough to be trusted with the thing if you go away.

Rick made this great confession. He said, “Noah was an amateur and he built the Ark, and he saved all of humanity. Professionals were the ones that were drafted and contracted to build the Titanic, and we know where that one ended up.”

Robert Cortes:

[laughs] Yeah, right to the bottom of the ocean.

Mingo Palacios:

Right. So just because you’ve got a bunch of professionals in your ministry, doesn’t mean that it’s going to go and see the kind of results that maybe God wants for it. Maybe you need to really challenge the people that you’re leading and say, “How many more amateurs can we bring to the table? How many of us professionals need to give away what we’ve been holding onto so that we can see this ministry that reflects Jesus?”

Let’s remember that Jesus was God incarnate; therefore, the church is Jesus incarnate. So if you don’t see your church that way, that your church is actually a representation of the heartbeat and inclusivity of Jesus, if your church and your ministry is

just an insider's group of the best of the best, you may be misrepresenting the God that you're asking people to worship.

I don't want to be caught there in 2020, Robert.

Robert Cortes: Neither do I. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: I want to give as much ministry away – I want to take my expertise, I want to chop it up into 100 pieces, and I want to hand it over to the people that love the ministry and love Jesus the most.

Robert Cortes: I can definitely say from experience, you have the innate and God-given ability to encourage and cheerlead people, and to allow people to step into stuff that they would never see themselves able to do.

I remember way back in the Microsite era, back then, thinking "I could not do and lead a Microsite. That's for pastors." That's the professionals you're talking about. But then, I didn't realize I was an amateur. [laughs] You gave me the opportunity to be the amateur – with some covering.

Mingo Palacios: There's checks and balances.

Robert Cortes: There's checks and balances, but ultimately, my heart took over, and what God put in my heart, and I loved the people that were put in front of me well. Even though I made mistakes like everyone else does from time to time.

Mingo Palacios: As do I.

Robert Cortes: But it ultimately led to me understanding that I've got some skills that I didn't know I had.

Mingo Palacios: Totally.

Robert Cortes: And I would've never, ever experienced that if it obviously wasn't for God, but obviously, if you as a leader weren't opening the door and saying, "You can do this."

Mingo Palacios:

That's really good. For our listeners out there, I want you to self-examine. I'm two years into this podcast. Man, we've learned so, so much about what great ministry looks like, but each of us are called to manage what God has put right in front of us. I think it's valuable to get insight from others.

Rick, again, honoring him so much – he says “it's smart to learn from your mistakes, but it's genius to learn from the mistakes of others.” I feel like this podcast and the conversations we've had here have afforded us a level of genius to learn from the mistakes and experiences of others.

If I was going to give any advice to people on this 100<sup>th</sup> episode looking forward, it's to remind yourself that if you are the professional in your camp, it's your responsibility to give away great opportunity. Don't hold it for yourself because you like the accolade or the cheer or your name on the screen, you like when everybody has a good experience and they come tell you what a great job you did.

You could be robbing somebody of that validation that they are hoping they're going to experience through the church in the relationship that they have with God by holding a position or a duty or a responsibility that you're just doing because it's on your job description. Remember that your job is to give away great ministry and see other people trust and know Jesus better through it. That's what makes great leaders.

Robert Cortes:

Wow. I remember hearing someone say a long time ago – and I can't remember who said it, but they said, “You don't truly own anything until you give it away.”

Mingo Palacios:

So good. Quote that. That's so good. And I heard a great pastor this weekend say “Ministry at the end of the day is just on rent.” We are renting this ministry spot. It's not ours to own. We didn't buy it. Even if you found your ministry, if you're a church planter and you're like, “No, I paid for this,” that's God's church, and you are the leaseholder right now, but it's on rent. You're not going to be the person that's going to shepherd that community in 30 years, 40 years. That's got to be somebody that you pass the baton to.

So be a great renter. Set it up for as much success as you can, so when the next group of leaders come through, either at a lower level or a mid level or at the executive level, that stewardship is one of the values that they walk in going, “The people behind me loved this well.” That’s the least that we can do. That’s the most I’m trying to do right now.

And we’re living in that rhythm. This church didn’t get to 60 years by hirelings. There were people that loved and sacrificed and gave so that this church would see a brighter day. It’s our responsibility to see the baton, take hold of it, grip it with great confidence, and run as hard as we can.

Robert Cortes: Yeah. I love what you said last Sunday. You said, “The seats, the pews you’re sitting in now, someone paid for 60 years ago.”

Mingo Palacios: Totally.

Robert Cortes: You’re now paying into the next seats for the next people, for the next 60 years.

Mingo Palacios: Fully.

Robert Cortes: Something like that. It was really good. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: As we bring this episode to a close, 30 great minutes of reflection, I just want to encourage you. Don’t lose heart. If this is a hard season – it’s been a hard season for me, personally, as the lead pastor. 13 months in, man, I’ve got insane growing pains. I’ve got some stretch marks that I would never bring to the beach concerning my leadership. But I believe God has me right where He wants me.

So if you’re out there and you’re having a challenging season as you’re staring down the end of 2020, just believe that we are praying for you and that God has your best interest in mind. He’s not out to get you. He’s not out to spoil you or to abandon you. He’s got your best interest in mind. And we’re advocating for you.

Robert, anything for the listener?

Robert Cortes: Yeah. I guess something I'd like to say is that if you want to be on the PD Podcast and you have had challenges in your ministry, your church, and you'd like to be interviewed, please send us an email. You can send it to – where? There's plenty of places.

Mingo Palacios: You give your email, I'll give mine. [laughs]

Robert Cortes: Just send it to [robert@rebelfishlocal.com](mailto:robert@rebelfishlocal.com). We'll set up a call, we'll talk for a couple minutes, and if it's a good fit –

Mingo Palacios: Bring you onto the podcast.

Robert Cortes: We'll bring you onto the podcast.

Mingo Palacios: That would be so awesome. I love that deliverable. So good.

Hey, thanks for listening. I hope this conversation encouraged you. If it inspired you, tag somebody in on it, or share the episode through your own channels. It'd be a huge benefit to us, and it'd show Papa Rick a little bit of love. We love you guys. Celebrating 100 with you. We'll talk to you soon.

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