



Episode 102: Rewiring Christmas

Featuring: Mingo Palacios & Amanda Pavich

<https://thepodcast.com>

Transcript:

Mingo Palacios:

Hey, everybody. Welcome to the PD Podcast. My name is Mingo, and every time we get on the mic, my goal, my prayer, my focal point, is that you would learn something that you didn't learn or you didn't know prior to this conversation, playing wherever it is that you're playing it.

Today I promise to deliver on that statement, and the reason why I'm promising is because it's not me that's going to be talking for the majority of this conversation – although it is always a conversation. Today I've got my dear friend – and I don't know why we haven't had you, Amanda, on the podcast sooner.

Amanda attends our church. She's on staff with me at the EastLake Network. She's the director of the EastLake Leadership College, but she's also a doctor in her own discipline, in her own studies. She's a biblical archeology specialist, and that statement makes me sweat as I sit across the table, because I am not that smart.

But what I love is that the body of believers is always mutually pushing each other forward. Amanda sits as not just a leader in our network, but she's also such a great member of our church. Any time I'm on the platform delivering my due diligence, I always feel a sense of support and of unity from where we're at. Wherever you're sitting in the sanctuary, I'm like, "yes."

Amanda Pavich: I'm the "amen-er" in the crowd. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, she's not quiet when she agrees with what you have to say.

Amanda Pavich: Yes.

Mingo Palacios: Today is a great conversation, right in line with the holiday season. If you've already put the final touches on your Christmas talk, I'm hoping you're going to open it up and consider some revisions, because I asked Amanda to come in with her expertise and give us a professional look at the Luke 2 and just Christmas in a contextual vantage point.

Amanda Pavich: Right.

Mingo Palacios: Amanda, thank you so much for joining us.

Amanda Pavich: Aww, it is so good to be here. I love hanging out with you. I hate that we don't get to do it as often, but there's just so many things going on and so many children and all kinds of other things, right? [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: For some of our audience in the context, Amanda, you're going to give us a little bit of your background, but in this, the short bullet point is you've got a PhD in what most pastors are working their way towards, which is a high degree of education in theology and also a life that is forged and characterized by the character of God. You've got a great family story of adoption, and it's not a one-time occurrence, but it is the regular rhythm of your family.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, it is, and it just came up again recently. This Christmas season is actually marked in such a different way because we are unexpectedly adopting

again. This will be our fourth boy. It just kind of came up, and we're on the fast track. It's a little bit of an emergency. So we're working through that as we are working through all of the other wonderful things that come with the holiday season and all of the additional responsibilities, pressures, and all the fun stuff too.

Mingo Palacios: Joy, events, lights, services, snow, all of the above. [laughs]

Amanda Pavich: Yes, and a lot of classes on trauma and all kinds of other things. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: Totally. While still managing a great marriage and all of the above.

Amanda Pavich: Aww, that's so nice. You're so sweet. Thank you very much for that. Thank you.

Mingo Palacios: Give our listeners a little bit of background. I did just a splash on what you have dedicated your life to, and I think it's worth sharing your credentials as we dive into the topic.

Amanda Pavich: Thank you, yeah. This is so funny, because normally we don't like to share our credentials, right? My PhD is in biblical studies, and I have two areas of expertise. One is apologetics and the second one is biblical archeology, or archeology of the ancient Near East, is the way we say that now.

I am a trained field archeologist and a graduate of the International Academy of Evangelism, Apologetics, and Human Rights, and that's out of Strasbourg, France. What my area is about is stuff that I love, and I love to geek about it.

But really, the reason that I started even down this path was because it really spoke to me. I'm very passionate about God, and I love to worship, but I also really felt I needed a bit of a backbone, because I didn't grow up in a Christian family. I have parents that are very intelligent and asked a lot of questions, and I really couldn't provide a lot of those answers. When I got my calling to go into ministry, that was really the area where it was like, I need to study this

because I need to be able to at least come up with some answers and some ideas.

That's really how this all began, and then once I started touching the artifacts and I saw that you could see, touch, taste, hear, and smell these actual stories, where it wasn't just history and dry – it was three-dimensional, and you could get super dirty, and I just love that. I love being outside. So that stuff was amazing to me.

I love to bring historical facts and things that we learn from archeology to the biblical text, really for the purpose of illumination and encouragement and fun. I love to be creative with the biblical text and just have so much fun. When we're teaching in the Leadership College, that's one of the things I absolutely love to bring to the table, this idea that we have so much cultural information.

In the field of archeology, it's very interesting because archeology is a destructive science. Once we pull it out, you can't put it back. So we have to be very painstaking with our method. It takes forever to tear down a site to the level of the biblical text because those time periods are so old. If you think how many thousands of years are on top of the stuff we really want to get to, you can't just scrape it off with a bulldozer. You have to be methodical with those things as well.

Mingo Palacios:

And meticulous through every layer.

Amanda Pavich:

Yes. Someone cares about that stuff too. I'm like, "Meh, ancient Rome, who cares?" [laughs]

Mingo Palacios:

Wasn't built in a day. Just scrape it off in an hour.

Amanda Pavich:

Yeah, just whatever. But you can't do that. I think that that is one of the unfortunate things about the field of archeology; it brings so much light to the biblical text and to these narratives, but it takes so long to get to the pulpit. Up until quite recently, it's taken almost 20 years to get from the dig field to the pulpit.

As we are sharing our word and our message and trying to provide cultural context to some things that might seem a little funky or weird to us modern people, we have to make sure that we're not using old information. It has been very difficult up until now. Recently, with the digital way that we're able to even just get photographs –

Mingo Palacios: Access information, yeah.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, and be able to file reports and those types of things. But if you can imagine, all of the antiquities authorities are still paper. It's like bagging things, mesh bags. It is old.

Mingo Palacios: Old world – yeah.

Amanda Pavich: That part is like the last scene in *Indiana Jones*, where there's like warehouses and there's guys pushing the Ark.

Mingo Palacios: They're like, "That was the Ark of the Covenant!"

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, right, exactly. It really is like that. Anyway, you can imagine how difficult it is sometimes to get good, solid historical information.

The Nativity is one of those areas where we have preached the same things that are not perhaps as accurate as maybe we would like them to be.

Mingo Palacios: Me coming from a teaching perspective, as I'm laying down – I probably teach 48 weeks a year, maybe a little bit less.

Amanda Pavich: And dang, you're good. You're good, too. You do a good job.

Mingo Palacios: Oh, stop. Okay, a few more. [laughs]

Amanda Pavich: I mean, you really, you're so fun. [laughs] I love it.

Mingo Palacios: But you do one of two things. You go to school and you understand that it's your job to do your due diligence, so you are chasing down Strong's numbers and you're looking at Greek translations and Hebrew

translations, trying to do your Spirit-led due diligence. I was always taught you bring commentaries in at the very end so that somebody else's perspective doesn't necessarily –

Amanda Pavich:

Cloud your judgment.

Mingo Palacios:

Cloud what you're trying to discover yourself. I was confessing to you earlier, before we hit record, that oftentimes I'll actually go to older work, older published resources, because I trust them more than the newest, hottest, latest whatever. Stuff that's on trend I think needs due time to be proofed.

Amanda Pavich:

It does, absolutely. Right now, one of my friends and colleagues who was the general editor of a new book that's coming out that we'll talk about in a little while, he is the director of the Tall el-Hammam Excavation Project. That is biblical Sodom, and that has been something that's been a huge linchpin to people believing that the biblical stories are actually true. It's a huge stumbling block for a lot of people. And they have been digging that site for 15 years.

Mingo Palacios:

Wow.

Amanda Pavich:

Just now, they feel like they have enough information to be able to go, and they're putting all the papers out at all of the academic conferences, all the journals, they're doing all of the fiery emails back and forth between different sides – and that's really how new knowledge and new information comes to be.

Mingo Palacios:

Emerges.

Amanda Pavich:

Correct. So you do need to wait.

Mingo Palacios:

Then I feel like I'm good at waiting. But I'm also a creature of habit, so I go back to these same few resources, and I trust them, and nobody's called me a heretic yet. Or at least, I haven't heard it from the pews.

But it's funny; I was in the same room as you as we were hearing somebody talk about Christmas, and those people remain unnamed, but I was hearing

things like the manger, and it's not what we display on every Nativity scene on every church block. The inn, is it a cave? Is it a house? Is it a hotel? Is it Airbnb? Is it VRBO?

Amanda Pavich: Airbnb with new rules. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: Yes, right? The new rules. But who are the shepherds? Are they the lowest of low societally? Are they trusted few? I'm just looking to give our listeners a few – like, this is worth digging into – no pun intended. But all of what we're going to talk about is going to be like the tip of an iceberg, because you've got some great resources to send people towards in a publication that's coming out.

Amanda Pavich: That's true, yes. I do. Why don't we talk about the Nativity first, because I think that's the crux of a lot of –

Mingo Palacios: It's central, yeah.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, it's central. You walk into someone's home and they have the little Nativity scene there.

Mingo Palacios: Confession: we do.

Amanda Pavich: Yes, I do. I love mine. But I also – this is so funny. When I was younger and more like “grr” about this kind of stuff – some of these things make me so irritated. I used to put the wise men over to the side and write on a little sign, “Two years later...” [laughs] Because I just couldn't even put them in the same little area. I'm such a dork.

Mingo Palacios: Jesus is in diapers. He's in diapers.

Amanda Pavich: So bad, I know. And now I'm a little more relaxed. But man, yeah. So I think that we all know how the Nativity normally looks. It's Mary and Joseph, a baby in a trough, in a barn, and some people will even say it's a cave. If you go to Israel –

Mingo Palacios: Cave is newer.

Amanda Pavich: I think it's because when you go there and you're doing the "historical tour" –

Mingo Palacios: I'm seeing it. If you don't see it, I'm seeing fingers quoting right now.

Amanda Pavich: Yes, the air quotes are coming up right now. They have a very elaborate display in a grotto-like thing, and there's a little mosaic star on the ground. That's supposed to be the point where Jesus was born.

Mingo Palacios: It's like silver, right?

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, right. And probably not. That's probably not where Jesus was born. I hate to tell you that.

Mingo Palacios: I want my money back.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah. There's a couple of things in the text, if we talk about Luke 2:1-7.

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, please.

Amanda Pavich: Do you want to read it, or should we just go through it?

Mingo Palacios: No, everybody's going to know it, so you can take us to the –

Amanda Pavich: Hopefully we know it, right?

Mingo Palacios: Well, if you don't, hey, pause the episode.

Amanda Pavich: Just pull it out. Just pause and go read.

Mingo Palacios: Go read Luke 2. Welcome back from reading Luke 2. Now, Amanda, teach us some stuff.

Amanda Pavich: I think there's a couple of adjustments that need to be made. The first thing is that we talk about this idea when we're talking about the lineage of Joseph and Mary. Joseph was of the line of David, so that is a royal line.

When we talk about this idea that he and Mary showed up to this town for the census, and that

somehow they were not allowed to come in or that there wasn't space for them or whatever, that really doesn't jive with the way that people have very long historical memories in the ancient Near East. So when he showed up and he said, "Hey, I'm Joseph, son of Heli, son of Matthat, son of Levi," the odds are that someone in the town would've made space for him. It's like coming and saying, "I'm the cousin of so-and-so, the sister of so-and-so" and you're like, "Yeah, I'm sorry."

If you think about the context of the census and what the town looked like at that point, I think a good reference point is we have all these wildfires in southern California, so there are these times where people have to evacuate. Basically you're just like "let's get out and let's go wherever we can." People are so generous, they just open up their homes, and they're like, "Hey, y'all come in, let's do this" or whatever. It's that kind of thing.

Mingo Palacios:

You make space.

Amanda Pavich:

You make space. They're packed to the gills. So at this point, whenever there's a royal decree, you have to follow it. The town was pretty packed.

Furthermore, Mary had family around. Just 6 months ago, she was visiting relatives in the hill country right around there, the hill country of Judea. That's in Luke 1:39, I think it is. So if they didn't have space for them, they would've just gone to some other relatives.

Mingo Palacios:

Further.

Amanda Pavich:

Yeah, just a little further out. What it says from that context is that while they were there, that's when he was born. That context is that they weren't just there and then she had the baby; they were there for a while. They knew that she was having this baby. Having a baby in the ancient Near East is a community event, and it is really, really important, especially at the time period when Jesus was born, because there weren't that many babies born successfully at that time period. The medical care was

not that amazing. Having a baby really mattered to the community.

So even if it was a “shameful” type situation – again, air quotes.

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, not ideal, not married.

Amanda Pavich: Right, not married, and a crazy weird story being said, if you think about that. “Oh yeah, totally, this is divine, whatever.” They still would have protected the child. So to say “we’re going to stick you out in the cold...”

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, because that’s the way it feels. Everyone’s like “oh hey, closed door, closed door, closed door,” and Joseph wiggles into a back barn door and he’s like, “We can do it here.”

Amanda Pavich: Right. Why do we think of the barn? I think it’s because the word “manger” is in there. In our modern times, a manger or just a feeding trough, that’s in a barn. But in the ancient Near East during this particular time period, it wasn’t in a barn. There was a standard practice of keeping animals in the house. The type of house where they would have been, it’s like a Hebrew four-room house. In archeology, obviously we go and find the remains of the homes.

Archeology, just so you know, it’s the study of old stuff. We start when people start leaving their trash around. [laughs] That’s when our history starts.

Mingo Palacios: That’s not a case for how you should live your life, but this is what you’re rummaging through.

Amanda Pavich: Yes. We’re rummaging through people’s trash, their ruins, what they’ve left behind. So you see the footprint of these houses, and they’re very similar. They’re like track houses, basically. It’s the same footprint, same two or three footprints.

One of them is that they have the animals inside, in the ground floor. The reason that they did this was because animals were extremely valuable at that particular time. While sheep were kept out in the sheepfolds, at night you would bring in the pregnant

ones, the ones that were more valuable, the ones that were more vulnerable, any of them that were sick. You would bring them inside for protection, and then also to keep them from being stolen. That was a common practice in the ancient Near East. It sounds weird to us, but you also have to think – have you ever been to a thoroughbred barn?

Mingo Palacios: Yeah. Del Mar Race Track right over here.

Amanda Pavich: Right, where they race the thoroughbreds. People get married in those. You could eat off the floor. So that's what we have to think about when we're thinking about being inside on the ground floor.

The other reason is because in Palestine, it gets very cold at night. So the extra bodies in there, the extra animals, all that heat – yes.

Mingo Palacios: It's cumulative heat.

Amanda Pavich: Cumulative heat. So that actually is a huge help. And then the ones that you would be milking the next day, so you wouldn't go out to find them again; they would just be right downstairs for convenience.

Mingo Palacios: But you're living in a multistory setup.

Amanda Pavich: Multistory situation, yeah.

Mingo Palacios: It's like you're parking your car in the garage.

Amanda Pavich: Yes, exactly. [laughs] It's kind of like that.

Mingo Palacios: Like, I don't want to walk out to my cold car. I want my car to be warm in the garage. Especially my Volkswagen bus.

Amanda Pavich: Yes. You want to be able to see out your mirrors.

Mingo Palacios: I do.

Amanda Pavich: Yes, exactly. So that's what that is. And then in archeology we uncovered a lot of these stone-carved and plastered troughs in the middle of the basement of the – yeah.

Mingo Palacios: So stone, like think of my salsa grinder, but like a larger –

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, your *molcajete*. Hey, I know that word. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, like a larger version. Good luck, translators. We have transcribers. Good luck transcribing that. But it is more of a stone basin or plaster basin.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, a stone or plasterwork basin. Again, in the ancient Near East, there are men things and there are women things, and never the twain shall meet. A birth is a woman thing, so it's really unlikely that Joseph would have been actually physically present at the birth of Jesus. Again, that Nativity scene – like, after the fact, here comes Joseph.

Mingo Palacios: So then Mary would've had her squad.

Amanda Pavich: Yes, her squad.

Mingo Palacios: She would've had like a doula helping take care of business.

Amanda Pavich: Right. It says in Luke 2:7 that there was no room for them in the inn. That word "room," *topos*, that's actually "space." It's not a room like a hotel room. It just means "space." And then the Greek word translated in in that verse, *kataluma*, that's the word. That's only used one other time in the New Testament, and that's in Luke 22:11, and then there's a parallel story in Mark 14:14. That word describes the upper room, the upper chamber, which is like the guest space, so like our community room that we have, which is a nice open space.

So when it's saying there's no room for them, the guest room was not available – again, because everyone's packed in during the census time.

Mingo Palacios: The way you would generously welcome somebody in who was evacuating from somewhere else.

Amanda Pavich: Right, exactly. And they would be there for a while, because again, in the ancient world, when you went

someplace, it was an ordeal. You didn't just go for the day and then get on a plane and then come back.

Mingo Palacios:

No weekend getaways.

Amanda Pavich:

Yeah, that's not really the way that that worked. And I think the ESV, that rendering of Luke 22:11, that's the correct one.

Anyway, if there wasn't space for her to be doing the women stuff, then they would be doing it down in this very clean area, and that was probably the only available spot or whatever.

Mingo Palacios:

That makes sense. When we hear of the different – I love that you tackled the space.

Amanda Pavich:

And then the inn part, yeah.

Mingo Palacios:

Yeah, let's go towards the inn.

Amanda Pavich:

This is the thing. Sometimes I feel like when we are reading the biblical text later on, we're always putting what we think they should have said or should have known or thought or whatever onto the text. That's a bummer, because if Luke wanted to say "inn" for us to understand an inn like in the story of the Good Samaritan, that word *pandokyon*, or innkeeper, *pandokys*, then he would've used that word. But he didn't use that word. He used a different word. He used –

Mingo Palacios:

Upper room.

Amanda Pavich:

Kataluma. So it's not an inn – it's a guest space in a house. It's basically exactly as we were saying. There just wasn't space. So that's where he was. He was born down in the bottom of a Hebrew four-room house with animals, with the lady squad. It's kind of cool, though, that Joseph was there and that it is talked about that he was there, because that really shows how progressive he was in his thinking and really realizing how important it was. Obviously this was something happening that was different and outside of the cultural norms for him to even be present and around. I think that's a neat point.

Mingo Palacios: If I'd been promised that the child being born to the woman I was going to marry was going to be the savior of all mankind, I'd probably want to see what's up. I'd want to see that baby glow.

Amanda Pavich: For sure. We add these cultural elements to the story, what we learn from archeology. If we're talking about the Nativity in terms of that it's about rejection and that God understands being rejected, even the King – or even humble beginnings, that the King of Kings was born in this lowly thing – we're really missing the point of the story.

Mingo Palacios: Are they invalid points altogether?

Amanda Pavich: No, I don't think they're invalid points; I just think that they're sub-points.

Mingo Palacios: You think there's a greater point.

Amanda Pavich: I think the greater point is that it's about belonging, and it's about family, and it's about the idea that God wanted His Son to be with two people that had trust and tenacity.

If you really think, even though Joseph had historical lineage, he wasn't anybody special. And Mary wasn't anybody special. But they did have trust, and they were tenacious. I think that's kind of what God asks from us. "Do you believe Me, and will you stick it out?"

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, that's good.

Amanda Pavich: Because as I'm thinking and putting myself in that quiet moment where everyone else has gone off to do their family party stuff – I hear glasses clinking and different things or whatever upstairs – and Mary and Joseph are down with the animals and Jesus. Isn't that interesting that there is always a time where it's just me and you and God? And other people are saying what they're saying upstairs.

Mingo Palacios: Or doing what they're doing, and the Savior meets you in this meek moment.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, and it's a quiet space. There are going to be times when God asks us to do things that we're not going to get the crowd's approval. We're not going to get all the people going, "Yeah! This is amazing!"

Mingo Palacios: Or won't be accommodating.

Amanda Pavich: No, they won't be. Or they'll just be like, "Okay, we're not going to turn you out, but we're not going to be super supportive of this."

Mingo Palacios: Embrace.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, right. I think that even in my own life, in my own adoption journey, when you decide to adopt – as you know, as an adoptive dad – sometimes people don't understand, and it can be heartbreaking for you. But you know that God's asked you to do this.

Especially when it comes with – a couple of my kiddos are older, and they come with some trauma. They've had really, really tough lives. People can say, "Gosh, why are you doing this? Why in the world?" So there's whispers, even of "I'm not really sure that you're up for this" or "I don't really understand, this is super weird."

Mingo Palacios: Yeah, "this doesn't make sense to me."

Amanda Pavich: "This doesn't make sense to me and it's outside of my scope." So it's like, do you have the tenacity to stick that out? Do you follow in the footsteps of Mary and Joseph and say, "I believe you, God"?

Mingo Palacios: And we're willing.

Amanda Pavich: We're willing.

Mingo Palacios: I think probably where we wrestle the most – I'll speak for myself, where I wrestle the most in my own culture is I try to measure myself according to the task ahead of me. If I assume that I don't have what it takes for the task ahead of me, I don't approach the bench. So there is this faith, this zone that says, "Lord, if You've willed it and I don't measure up to it in my own perspective, I'm going to trust You for the difference

between what I see in myself and what You promise.”
Therein lies the faith.

Amanda Pavich:

Right, that’s the faith. I think sometimes it’s so good to have that community. When we talk about family, some people don’t have biological family, but they do have a community around them. They have people that are the “family,” right? The fram. [laughs] So we have people that are the aunties and the uncles and the moms and the dads.

Mingo Palacios:

They’re surrogates.

Amanda Pavich:

Yeah, the people that God puts in our heart. And the church, really. They’re put in our hearts and in our lives to be those people who are like “yeah, I’m with you.” I do think, though, that even in that family aspect, there are times where they’re questioning. It’s like, “I trust you, but I don’t know about this.”

Mingo Palacios:

I don’t think there’s anything wrong – certainly in the adoption process, Fallon and I, after a long day with a challenging young son, we’ll ask the question, “Do we have it?” Obviously the answer is yes, because God has provisioned for all these things. It’s His grace that’s allowed this to all come together. It wouldn’t have come together if He hadn’t willed it. But I think it’s okay in our humanity to ask, like, “Wow...”

Amanda Pavich:

“Do I have that in me? God, give me the strength to be able to do this, because You obviously think very highly of me.” [laughs]

Mingo Palacios:

Right. Trust me, I’ve heard it said in some really great spaces that God has a keen skill for trusting people with trouble. Where there are what the world would see as troublesome things, there are people who are imprinted with His image, who He says, “Where the world sees trouble, I see family. I’m going to trust you with what society would call the troublesome in order to bring near one who I’ve made in My own image.”

Amanda Pavich:

Yes, absolutely.

Mingo Palacios: That's a tall glass of water to own. But to be counted, even given a chance to do that, I think is really overwhelming.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, just an opportunity to be outside of ourselves. I just think, how many times are we asked to do something and you're just like, "I don't even know where my life is going right now." [laughs] Like, "Okay, Jesus, okay."

Mingo Palacios: For sure. And even for the listeners who – I love the imagery that you painted of a room with much to-do upstairs and the clinking of glasses and the murmuring of conversation, and light and smell and sound, all the things that would make you feel like you have some sense of value, and yet it's in the quiet chaos of what's below that God prefers His entry.

Amanda Pavich: Yes, right.

Mingo Palacios: If that's where the Savior makes His first arrival, maybe we would be more content in that quiet chaos that we find ourselves in.

Amanda Pavich: I love that. That's good.

Mingo Palacios: Thank you.

Amanda Pavich: See? You should preach about that.

Mingo Palacios: We should have a podcast about this. [laughs]

Amanda Pavich: There we go, we should do this. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: So here's my other question. I'm going to shotgun this one to you, because always, I love that you tackled the manger, but if there are two big visual images brought to the table, there's always the manger scene – Mary, Joseph, Jesus – but then there's always the shepherds.

You hear everything from the shepherds were this humble, faithful – they were waiting and they were doing their job, and they instantly correlate shepherding from David. He was chosen as king. He was of stature and character. So these must've been

stand-up fellows. And if God says “I’m telling you good news, go and see” – is that accurate? Are we missing it? Is there a way or a place where we can hear even more archeological support for the occupational hazards that these men may have been or not have been?

Amanda Pavich:

Right. I think it is a little bit of a misnomer to say the shepherds were necessarily ruffians or necessarily the lowliest. Those are really the people that worked in the pottery factory. Those are the ones that were way out. All the images with the pottery and stuff – that’s a whole other podcast, but I think you really see the juxtaposition of the high and the low there.

The shepherds, it was really man’s work. Again, women things were women things. Men things –

Mingo Palacios:

Common.

Amanda Pavich:

Yes. We would definitely call it – we would say now a blue collar job. We would say they’re some of these jobs, like the construction jobs, when you’re working on an oil rig.

Mingo Palacios:

A trade.

Amanda Pavich:

Yeah, where you just think of big, strong, sturdy men doing that kind of job. That’s really the shepherd thing.

As far as the young boys doing that, they would have been trusted with a little bit of things there, family-wise, like “We’ve got all the free child labor. We have many children, and that’s why we have many children, so we can have this shepherding economy.”

Mingo Palacios:

A workforce, yeah.

Amanda Pavich:

But I think that as far as the overseers and the oversight, the shepherds in that particular story would be more of the overseers. If they’re out there and they’re seeing a star, that means they’re out there in the evening, in the cold. Very cold Palestinian nights.

Mingo Palacios: So it's not like the preferred, easy side of shepherding.

Amanda Pavich: No, it's the overnight shift.

Mingo Palacios: I've heard it preached two ways: that these would've been hired hands – not the good ones; they were taking the harder shift. I've also heard that shepherds in a court of law, their testimony wouldn't even have held up.

Amanda Pavich: I can honestly tell you, I don't know about that part about the court of law.

Mingo Palacios: Aha, Part 2!

Amanda Pavich: I know, we'll have to go find out and come back.

Mingo Palacios: Part 2: The Shepherd's Story.

Amanda Pavich: But sometimes we take these huge liberties. Again –

Mingo Palacios: Well, did you hear how I delivered it? "I've heard," but I've not studied. It's information that's come across my brain as I've focused in on a particular topic.

Amanda Pavich: Right. I think, though – this is the way that I approach things.

Mingo Palacios: This is great.

Amanda Pavich: If it doesn't say it, then we don't necessarily know. So God didn't necessarily think that those were the important details. What we can do is we can put in narrative richness. But when we're speaking about that and teaching about that and speaking to other people about those things, I think we need to be careful and say, "It's kind of like this. It would be like that."

Mingo Palacios: There we go. That's a really responsible way to not misquote or just blatantly be way off-track, to say, "I think it could've been something like this."

Amanda Pavich: "It could be something really similar to that." There are a lot of these cultural elements that were very specific

to certain parts of the ancient Near East and not others. So when we have somebody that is writing a text for people that are really wanting to provide a rich understanding of a cultural context, we really get off on some of these tangents that there is no evidence for that.

It's kind of like when we talk about the Garden Tomb and those types of things – and now I'm really hitting on some – people are like, "Ooh!" I know, right? I'm so sorry. [laughs] But that wasn't the tomb of Jesus, because the biblical text is very clear about what the tomb is supposed to look like. In archeology, we know what a tomb from the first century looks like versus a tomb from the Iron Age or some other time.

Those are the types of things where we do have concrete scientific evidence for these things, and it's not the other thing. But it's okay that we don't have that. There's so many of these things – again, it's like, what is the main point that we're trying to get across?

The main point is that there were some people that were paying attention. They were willing to say, "You know what? I'm going to go and see. I'm not going to be so in tune with what I'm doing and my work and my life and I'm focused on my device in front of me and my world that I'm not going to notice that there's an anomaly, and I'm going to say 'let's go check that out.'" They were willing to put into motion their...

Mingo Palacios:

Curiosity.

Amanda Pavich:

Yeah, their curiosity. I think that's really more the point of it. What type of shepherd that they were or what type of guys they were –

Mingo Palacios:

You could obsess over the wrong thing.

Amanda Pavich:

Yeah. It's fun, we can come up with some interesting stories, but what's factual is that –

Mingo Palacios:

What's there that you can draft off of.

Amanda Pavich:

Yes. For them to be on the overnight shift or whatever, no, it's not the most ideal shift, but it

doesn't mean that they're the worst. Flocks were so valuable. I think now, I could be wrong, but camels are like worth \$40,000. They cost a car.

Mingo Palacios: Do they come with Bluetooth? [laughs]

Amanda Pavich: I know, right? [laughs] Eh, blue tongue, maybe.

Mingo Palacios: For real.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah, don't get too close. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: But livestock is extremely valuable.

Amanda Pavich: So valuable. Again, if you're a hired hand, that's your job. That's your livelihood. So you really have to sit here and say not everybody was a big – it's not a den of robbers all over the ancient Near East. It wasn't like you have the good people and the bad people.

Mingo Palacios: Maybe for the storyline, like you said, you're trying to fit into the story – the person who feels the most disqualified, I want them to feel like they have a part of tonight's message. So I can say the shepherds, which in my context – I don't know any shepherds personally, but if there were shepherds, that'd be a sucky job.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah. The shepherds that are over in Palestine in the modern – right now, in our time, they're not ruffians necessarily. They're just people that this is their job. It's just like the people that go out and have to wrangle cattle and they're like cowboys. It's the same type of job. But it's their livelihood. It's how they earn their money. It's a good job.

Mingo Palacios: And you can't blanket all of them into being like felons.

Amanda Pavich: No, you can't. Or to say that they're uneducated or whatever, yeah. We're taking it a little far.

Mingo Palacios: And this is why this is so important. You don't try to craft into your story something that makes the story rich. You've got to draft out of what is there.

Amanda Pavich:

Right, and then really let the Holy Spirit – because there's enough historical fact. God has given us enough that we don't need to make stuff up. We don't need to embellish. We don't need to add things to it. We can really just sit quietly and allow the Holy Spirit to tell us what is the part that we need to highlight.

And then if there's an area where we should study a little bit more or find some more facts, then let's go there. But let's allow the Holy Spirit to really lead us into those things. We don't need to make up – I think in our culture now, because everything has to be so big and so crazy and so amazing, and the filter has to be perfect, and there's no reality show that you go on that you don't earn less than a million dollars and those types of things. Everything is just so extra.

We don't have to do our speaking that way in order to make the story valuable.

Mingo Palacios:

God and the Spirit are plenty powerful.

Amanda Pavich:

Yes, so powerful.

Mingo Palacios:

It's actually about getting out of the way and being as true to it as you possibly can. I do believe God's grace covers so much. I think some of the messages I've delivered in the two decades of trying to tell my peers about a person named Jesus, God knows I've probably really missed the mark.

Amanda Pavich:

Yeah, I think we all do. But I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Gospel is so simple. We can muck it up pretty good, but we can also make it really fun. So there's the balance there of making it fun with creativity, but then also not mucking it up.

Mingo Palacios:

I really appreciate – you're not discrediting somebody who has a great knack for bringing one story in parallel with what they're reading in Scripture and saying there are some similarities that can help you wrap your brains around this, while reserving the fact that God, you will never wrap your brains around.

Juxtaposition is a great word to keep in the forefront of your mind here, because here we are; we're trying

to put a human, tangible language, brain matter, to the Entity, the Person, that holds the entire cosmos in His fingerprint.

Amanda Pavich:

It's just crazy to think about that. Also, the ancient culture is so bizarre compared to our culture now. Especially, we're living in a post-Christian culture, so people don't have any fundamental baseline understanding of the biblical texts, some of the biblical stories, like they used to 20, 30, 40 years ago. So we do have to maybe back the bus up a little bit and say, "Okay, let's go over this." Like when we say "I'm sure you know what Luke 2 says." Well, do they? Do we?

Mingo Palacios:

Do we?

Amanda Pavich:

I don't know, maybe we don't.

Mingo Palacios:

That's great. Totally great.

Amanda Pavich:

Because if all we're hearing is about Santa and other things, it's like, boy, that's muddying the waters, right? [laughs]

Mingo Palacios:

Yeah, absolutely. It's funny because at first I thought, maybe we can tackle Santa. Maybe we can tackle the Christmas tree. But I think this is – my bones are warming because I'm thinking about the due diligence that I need to continue to put into my own preparation for Christmas Eve. Not to embellish or try to stretch what is, but to just really ask the Lord to inspire me in a way that can communicate it according to the people that He's entrusting my voice with. This community, in this city.

Whoever's listening, God's got a certain kind of community in your certain kind of area for your certain kind of voice. This is where I think it's really valuable to understand that while there are great luxuries in being able to hear other preachers preach other messages, you cannot replace that with how God will inspire you directly.

Amanda Pavich:

Right. I think when we go and we want to speak about something, starting with the Scripture and taking that meditative moment and really saying, "Lord, what is

this that You want to say?” – because we come to the Scriptures with so much stuff and so many preconceived ideas.

Mingo Palacios:

Yeah, highly filtered.

Amanda Pavich:

Right. So, what is it that we want to peel away? Even in our own studies – because there are so many of us that have studied this and have studied it for a long time, and sometimes even that can get in the way.

You just really want to make sure that when we’re coming to this idea of teaching from the biblical text, that we’re really starting in the basic spot, which is starting with Jesus, starting with the Gospel, and then what is the Gospel element in this cultural story?

It was so funny; I was thinking about this talk – this is such a random aside, but I was thinking about this talk and about how in archeology, we’re going through a people’s trash and trying to figure out the cultures, and there are some really odd things in the ancient eras that people did. Very strange, very odd.

Then I was driving and I saw somebody pushing a dog in a baby stroller and I thought, “I wonder – archeologists in 2,000 years are going to be like, ‘and what was this?’” [laughs]

Mingo Palacios:

“And they worshipped these four-legged animals.”

Amanda Pavich:

Because it’s plastic, it’ll still be here. So I just thought, this is so random. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios:

That’s really funny.

Amanda Pavich:

That’s how my mind works.

Mingo Palacios:

Fast forward. Okay, so here’s what I want to do. I want to pivot and I want to give some resources to our listeners. If this wasn’t a large enough breadcrumb and you’re not compelled, so be it. Not every conversation has to be right up your alley. But for several, I’m sure you’re going, “What more can I grab onto that can help me better prepare myself as a junior archeologist?”

I want to have some tools and I want to rightly steward the space and the place that God has allowed me to hold a voice. So how can I do that? And will you please tell our listeners about the Leadership College?

Amanda Pavich:

Oh, thank you, yeah. The resource that is brand new – it will be released January 15th, and this is really a labor of love. It's called *The Harvest Handbook of Bible Lands*, and it is gorgeous. The photography, the maps, it's fantastic. It's languages, culture, geography, archeology. But it's all the new stuff. This is really what updates –

Mingo Palacios:

Which has taken 20 years to go from the dig to the pulpit.

Amanda Pavich:

Exactly. These are my friends and colleagues who really just put their hearts on the line. You know when things happen and you're like, "How in the world was I even able to do this?" This is one of those things where I'm just like, are you kidding me? This is so crazy.

I was able to represent the college and be one of the contributing writers for this great book. But the general editor of the book – again, it's *Harvest Handbook of Bible Lands*; it's available on Amazon. You can preorder it now, and it'll come out on January 15th. It's gorgeous. Basically, what he said was, "If you want to be involved in this, nobody gets paid, because I want every penny of this book to go towards archeological research." And boy, if we all didn't jump onboard. It's just the coolest thing to be able to be on mission in archeology. So cool.

Mingo Palacios:

And it's such a true resource.

Amanda Pavich:

It is. It's a true resource. The people that are doing these writings are what we call biblical maximalists. These are the scientists and the archeologists, like myself, that believe that the Bible is a valid historical document.

So if you're wanting to be encouraged – this isn't for scholars. This is just for everybody. So if you're

wanting to be encouraged and you just want to geek out a little bit more and get a little more context, but the most up-to-date stuff, then this really is an incredible resource for you.

Mingo Palacios: I love it. Amazon, it'll be available January 15th.

Amanda Pavich: January 15th, and you can preorder it. *Harvest Handbook of Bible Lands*.

Mingo Palacios: That's great. Now, for somebody who's going, "Man, this doctor has totally entranced me with a full-on dissertation of Christmas ideologies and theory and archeology – how do I get into your world?" A great way to do that –

Amanda Pavich: Aww, I would love to have you in my world. [laughs]

Mingo Palacios: By asking if the Leadership College would be a great fit for you – which you are the director of. You go toe-to-toe, face-to-face with students every single week.

Amanda Pavich: Yeah. We have a wonderful cohort right now that's going on. We are a partner site for Southeastern University. We are on the EastLake Church campus in San Diego. It's amazing, because what we're really finding out now is that in colleges, the students – a lot of parents and families are spending a lot of money for degrees that are not really getting them anywhere, and they're not feeling connected.

The new studies that are coming out in the last 5 or 10 years show that you have a higher rate of graduation the more connected and loved a student feels. What they're doing right now, Southeastern, it's one of the top five fastest-growing private universities in the United States right now because they are disrupting the educational model. They're taking their education and they're putting it on a church campus.

We have ministry schools, but you can earn a degree along the way. We have Associate's degrees, Bachelor's degrees – not just ministry. We have business, we have digital media and design, we have a general Associate's. Really, what we're trying to do is train the next generation of leaders who help other

people find and follow Jesus. It's very simple, and it's so fun. We have this incredible team of humble leaders, like you.

It just is so neat, because they're not the ones that are up front, in front of everybody. They're the people that are making other people the heroes.

Mingo Palacios:

The day to day.

Amanda Pavich:

The day to day. And these students are disruptors in and of themselves, because they want to jump onboard to a program that is really doing something different. We want them to figure out along the way what God has for them. So they may not exactly know; they just want to be drawn to something, and we want to help them figure that out. We want to champion them in that.

I absolutely feel so incredibly honored. To be able to have landed in this spot where I can be on mission and also, I get my academic side – you know?

Mingo Palacios:

Yeah, you get to tickle both sides of that.

Amanda Pavich:

I'm just like, how in the world did I get to do this? It's so cool. Anyway, it's really, really great.

You can connect with me and you can connect with the college at Eastlake.college. You just go online to our website, and you can shoot me – there's a little form on there, you can get in touch with me. I love to have an interaction. I love to answer questions. I am available just to be a resource to you, just like, "Hey, I've heard this, is that true?" I don't have all the answers, but I can certainly find out and I can get back to you. Because I have people that do know these things, that are the Greek scholars of the universe or whatever, so we can talk about all that stuff.

Mingo Palacios:

That's so good. Amanda, thanks so much for coming and sharing your passion. Clearly, it seeps out of your skin. What I love is that it all points back to Jesus. It doesn't put the archeology itself on the highest pedestal; it doesn't put a people group on the highest

pedestal, or even the education that qualifies you to go and explore and understand all these things. But it's Jesus. It all boils down to Jesus.

Amanda Pavich:

That's right. It does, doesn't it?

Mingo Palacios:

That's the great leveler of all things, when we get Jesus in front of us. Every tool, every resource, every piece of information, it shines brighter when He's the point.

Amanda Pavich:

It does. I love that.

Mingo Palacios:

If you're listening today, my hope is that you're encouraged. I hope that you were challenged and compelled that you would take this conversation and you'd go dig deeper, you'd go find more information, or maybe go look around your own community for some people who would help you explore in the truest way, and that you'd bring two, three friends together and you'd go after a topic, or you'd go after a passage in Scripture, and you'd say, "How much of this can we discover beyond what is presented to us?" That we would roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty and we'd go and exercise our mind and our spirits. That would be a mutual growth that you could celebrate because God was leading you.

That's my encouragement as a leader and as a pastor on an everyday level for the people that I shepherd, hoping that they see the joy and the discovery in what we do as a living. That's really it.

If this conversation encouraged you, I would ask you to tag somebody in, or maybe share the conversation. If you'd be so polite as to subscribe, if you loved the conversation, you can always subscribe to the podcast. There's 100 and something episodes of just great conversations with leaders across the table.

Amanda Pavich:

So many good episodes.

Mingo Palacios:

I hope you set your own, and I hope it blesses somebody in the process. We'll talk to you guys soon.

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<https://thepodcast.com>

