

Pastors: Lead the Church in Faith!

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Well, let me go back a few years. I know this is a really special day for Jeremy. I feel the specialness. Michael Mireles, what year was it when you got your job? Or you got transferred down here? When was that? Six years this past December, so it's six plus years. Michael and Debbie were very dear brethren, members of our church there in San Antonio. God brought them to our church in the very early days when we were still meeting at Hackberry. They very quickly became core members of the church there. And what happened was, the days after we left Hackberry, we were meeting at Mark's restaurant, Michael got transferred working for AT&T. And he came to me and he said, he was asking what I thought, "Should I take the transfer or should I quit my job and find another one?" Well, to me it seemed like this might be the perfect opportunity for us to think seriously about a church plant in Laredo. Typically as I've prayed about starting new churches I have not wanted to move forward unless multiple families were being brought to us by the Lord for the new church plant. At that point in time it was only the Mireles'. And so for how long brother you guys drove back and forth from Laredo to San Antonio to come to church? How long was that? One year. It was a long time. That's a long drive to church. And you guys would typically be early. That was good. That's devotedness. And what happened was after a year two families, two more families from our church determined to move down to Laredo. So now we had three families and that was it, let's go. The Barrientes were one of those families. They're here. We had a single young man Daniel Alcala. He moved down from San Antonio down to the church down here. To our church plant.

What happened was the Mireles' actually bought an old real estate building that had a house in the back. And so they lived in the house in the back and they were able to have the church meet up in the old real estate building in front. And God began to bring some people some of those folks are here today. And the church grew. And we had individuals that made up this church plant do the preaching. We sent preachers down from San Antonio for awhile but we also were intermixing that with some of the folks down here doing some of the preaching and some of the Sunday School teaching. And that went on for awhile.

We began to have some problems down here. This, this work has been the longest church plant that we've been involved with from the time we started until actually putting the first church officer in place. Setting the church free. Independent. We had difficulties. We had a split. And what happened was we brought our brother Ves down here. We put him in a position of leadership. Ves was at the helm in by far the hardest months of this church plant. I know that he and I spent literally hours on the phone. He was having to deal with so many difficulties. And we by the grace of God we came through that season. Ves felt like his time here was at an end. He came back to San Antonio. At that point in time even the Mireles' were speaking about, Michael would talk to me about the possibility of moving back to San Antonio.

We recognized that this thing, humanly speaking, was being held onto by a thread. We presented the idea before the elders about the possibility of sending Zeek and Jeremy down here. They had both been involved in doing some.. . well, they were very active in a number of ways but they were doing some East Side evangelism. They were going out together. They

seemed like they'd be perhaps a good duo to send down here. And through various providences Zeek has gone back to San Antonio for the time. Jeremy it seemed, God really knit him here. It became very evident that he had a heart for the work that God was moving to give him and stir up and develop more and more a pastoral giftedness.

And that's where we find ourselves now and I am extremely grateful to the Lord. We were ready, we were ready to let this work go. I can tell you something. That in the fifteen years since we were a church plant, Grace Community there in San Antonio, in those fifteen years the greatest spiritual battles that I have experienced subjectively have come when we have sought to start a church. To start church plants. The devil resists this like crazy. The spiritual battles that were fought, were many. And I know they're not done. I mean we're hitting a milestone here and I just I want to take a bit of time right now and just thank the Lord that we have come to such an hour as this.

Father, thank You. Lord You know the desire. You know what we prayed for. I remember those prayers years ago. Praying that there would be a church here. Praying that the day would come when that pedestrian bridge would have foot soldiers from this church going back and forth to take the gospel to Nuevo Laredo, to this Northern tier of Mexico. We recognize that this was a strategic place for a church plant. Lord You know well the difficulties, the struggles, the discouragements, the times that humanly speaking we didn't think the work could make it. But Lord it seems that You've provided. You provided the families in the beginning. You provided with, with Ves to come and with Zeek and Jeremy to come. You've provided families to come. You've added families from here in Laredo for which we are very grateful. Lord, we've seen people converted here. Lord I pray, I pray that the years forward with this church, just as Mack desires to see fruit Lord, may there be fruit. The kind of fruit that you approve of. The kind of fruit that glorifies Jesus Christ. Lord thank You. Thank You that, that You've brought this body together. I thank You for everyone of the Christians that make up this little body, and I thank You Lord for raising up Jeremy to this very hour. We thank You that we are at a day when this church will finally and formally be set free to run no longer as a church plant of Grace but an independent work with their own Pastor. And I pray that in the days ahead you would add more pastors and deacons and Lord may may Your hand be upon them in a way that is very real. That speaks about Your ownership of this church. Father, bless them in a way that only You can bless them. We thank You. Thank you for the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ. And I pray that that salvation would be trumpeted from this church that they would be a light. A burning and shining light in a very dark city in our country. Lord I pray that you would do such things with this church as have not even entered into our minds yet. I pray in Christ's name, Amen.

I would just say here at the beginning that we want to remember there is a recognition today of our setting free of this church. There is a recognition today of Jeremy. There's an ordination. But we don't want to forget that this is not just some sort of human ceremony. I find reason in Scripture to have hope that something supernatural might happen when we come together like this, the church of God, to lay hands on a man.

Don't turn here. I'm going to have you turn to another text in just a second. But listen to this. First Timothy chapter 4 verse 14. These are Paul's words to Timothy. "Do not neglect the gift you have." Now listen to this. Timothy had a gift. What gift? I don't know. I mean it doesn't say specifically. But probably the gift to do what Timothy did. He doesn't say gifts plural. It's a

gift. So it probably represents all of what was bestowed on Timothy that day. Some sort of giftedness. You notice this, "which was given you". Not just when you were converted. Not just at some point along the way. But it was given you "by prophecy when the counsel of elders laid their hands on you." Something supernatural may very well take place here today. My desire would be that that would happen. Whether somebody is going to prophesy in the way that is meant here. Whether prophesying should be taken in a broader sense, I don't know. But I know this. That when a group of the presbytery, the presbuteros, the elders there. When a group of those men laid hands on Timothy something happened. And my desire is as gifted as Jeremy may be now that has led him to this hour that has caused us to see in him certain qualities as much as that may be true. My desire is that something would happen here this day that would propel him forward with a power of God in his life that he has not yet heretofore seen.

The text I would like to have you turn to is this, Matthew chapter 13 verse 58. Matthew 13:58. Jeremy, this is my charge to you today. I know that there's many things that could be said. And I know Mack has said many things. And even more than that I know your Dad has said many things. If anybody has sought to pour themselves into you your Dad has and I thought.. . I really thought it's unlikely I'm going to be able to come up here and say anything to you that he hasn't said. But the thing that I feel burdened today to say to you is this. Matthew 13:58. It's actually somewhat of a negative verse. But I want to pull the positive from it. Jesus Christ did not do many mighty works there. It really doesn't matter where "there" is. What really matters is why He didn't. The reason He didn't is because of their unbelief.

Jeremy this is what I want to stress to you. Lead this church in faith. And I don't mean just lead this church as a believer. Lead this church trusting God. You may remember this account. Right after Jesus Christ, some of His disciples came down from the mount of transfiguration. Do you remember the event? Man with a demon possessed son. Think about that account Jeremy. His disciples were down there. James, John, Peter they went up on the Mount with Him. But there were the rest of the disciples. We don't know if it was if it was all the final nine. We don't need to count Judas. I don't know if the eight who were genuinely God's people who hadn't been up there but some of them were there. We're not told exactly who they are by name but some of them are there. And I'll tell you this Jesus comes down off that Mount and as He sees this whole thing playing out and He comes up the father comes to Him and says, "I brought my son to your disciples and they weren't able..." They weren't able. You see it's another time when a mighty work wasn't done.

And you remember what Jesus said. Do you remember His words? Jesus answered. Jesus says... Now think about this. I want you to think about Jesus' eyes. When He came down off that Mount and He's confronted by the inability of His disciples to cast out that demon. He's about to say something and I want you to think about where His eyes went. Well I know it's like when I talk to you, my eyes are moving all over the place. But the very moment He started, the very moment He began to say, "O faithless and twisted generation" or "perverse." Where do you think His eyes were? Or at least where they darted to? Who was faithless? Brethren, when He gets to the end of this account it's His disciples who say "Lord, why weren't we able to cast that demon out?" You remember His answer? Not because of the father's unbelief. Not because of the son's unbelief. Not because of the crowd's unbelief. Because you as Christians did not have

the faith! God does not do many mighty works where there is no faith. Remember that brother. Remember that! Lead the church by faith!

Because you and I know it. You know the circles that we are acquainted with, there's a massive amount of unbelief. It's cloaked. It's cloaked as though it's presumption. But it's not. It's cloaked as though it would be presumption to do otherwise than what's being done. But that's not the case. It's unbelief. When we don't take God at the fullness of His promises. And live like the early church lived. Unbelief. Avoid it like the plague. We need to walk by faith. These guys were believers! They weren't the lost crowd! But clearly it takes more than just simply being a believer than to escape the realm of this impotent faithless perverse crowd. We don't want to be impotent. Jeremy, unbelief is a path of impotency in scripture. Again and again and again. That is the case. Jeremy, what I am saying to you is this. Intentionally take this church. I mean with forethought. With prayer. Not running into things presumptuously but prayerfully. Prayerfully. Take this church. Cause they're going to look to you. And you know this. This is no just simple cliché saying.

Churches do not rise above their leaders hardly ever. Rarely ever. They don't. And you know what, typically they will follow you into places that they themselves may never have believed that they could have even gone. But if you lead will them there they will follow you there. Lead this church into places and it takes faith to go. Brother! Beyond, beyond what your spiritual gifts might say is safe to go. Beyond what the size of the church may indicate that it's safe to go. Beyond that. Take the church down paths that demand that you trust Him. And do that over and over and over again.

That text in Malachi. You may remember. I'm not here to preach about tithing. But you know in an Old Testament context. Bring in your tithe. And you know what God said. "Put me to the test." Now I know there is a presumptuous putting of God to the test that you don't want to do. But listen. That's only when you expect God to do what He never promised to do. But what God did promise to do is be .. He sent His son into this world to be with His church to the end of this age to carry out the Great Commission. That promise "I will be with you" is a promise that ought to embolden you to do many things. Do many things in faith in that promise. Put God to the test. Over and over. Because He wants to be put to the test in this fashion. He wants that. Do that. Brother. Attempt the impossible!

Why? Because you have a God who says that He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond what you ask or think. Do the impossible! Why? Because you have a God of the impossible! That's why! The things that they sought to do in the book of Acts. Crazy! Crazy! Oh really a hundred and twenty people are going to go down from that upper room and they're going to take on the Roman Empire? They're going to take on the whole Jewish religious system? And they did it! And the church has survived for two thousand years. Walk in that faith. That's the faith. Don't ever be quick to say.. . Don't ever be quick to say, "We can't do that." Ever. Be quick to say it if it's something somebody suggests that may dishonor God. Be very quick to say it then. But don't ever be quick to say it because you feel like the church is too small, or you lack gift, or you lack the resources.

Don't ever be quick to say, "we can't do that" when it comes to that which seems.. . What? What is it?! What are the things that tend to cause us to stop in our tracks? To hesitate? Brother. Don't be quick to say, "we can't do that" just because it seems too big, too outrageous,

too much, too far, too expensive, too overall impossible. I want to remind you of the faith of Abraham.

Now you might want to turn to this. This is found in Romans chapter 4. The faith of Abraham is a great thing for us to remember. Because you know when Paul unwraps this faith for us, he shows us Abraham at a very old age; Sarah at a very old age! When the thing that God has promised is, humanly speaking, impossible. Let's read the account. Romans chapter 4. Of Abraham, Paul says, (Romans chapter 4 verse 18.) "In hope he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations and as he had been told, 'so shall your offspring be' he did not weaken in faith when" now notice this, "when he considered his own body." Because you see that's, that's what we do. We consider us. We consider our resources. We consider what we have. Or what we don't have. We consider the human possibilities. Right? He did. "When he considered his own body" and he certainly did consider it, "which was as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old. And when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb." I mean what's the consideration? Well, the consideration is this, Hundred year old men with ninety year old wives don't have babies. That doesn't happen. But notice this. "No unbelief" made him waiver concerning the promise of God. But he grew strong in his faith" and you want to take special attention to these words, "as he gave glory to God fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised."

Brother, I'm not talking about any small thing here. I'm talking about the glory of God is at stake in whether you trust Him and how you lead this church. The glory of God is at stake. God loves to be trusted. He loves to have His people do what Abraham did! To hope and believe against hope! Because I'll tell you. We are outclassed. Just humanly speaking. As Tozer said, "We are hopelessly outclassed." By what? We're fighting angels. Do you think we have the strength to do that? The world has smarter people, higher IQ's, more money. What we're faced, what we're up against, if it's not for God coming to our help we are in a hopeless situation. Which is exactly where Abraham was. "I'm a hundred years old!" "If God doesn't come through in some kind of mighty fashion, this isn't happening." But I'll tell you brought great glory to God to be trusted in that situation.

Martin Lloyd-Jones has some very helpful words concerning this. Listen to what he says. He says, "People often put faith like this to us. Now he's going to tell you what other people say faith is like, not what he believes it's like. What he says other people believe it's like. He says this like this, 'You go by train from London to Brighton and immediately they say, 'you're exercising faith. Faith in the engine. Faith in the engine driver. Faith in the rails. Faith in the sleepers, the bolts and nuts and so on.' Or they say, 'A man goes on an airplane, well he's exercising faith.'" Lloyd-Jones says, "I entirely dissent from that argument. And I think it's very important that we should disagree with it." Now I would just break from here. You hear people say, "Well it's just like sitting in that chair. You know you have to put your faith in that chair. You have to put your faith in the four legs." But listen to Lloyd-Jones, "To start with, I do not call that faith at all. Because to sit in that train and go from London to Brighton is not an exercise of faith. We're just doing something based upon the law of mathematical probability. That is a vital distinction. What we are saying to ourselves, either consciously or unconsciously is this, 'The chances are that this train will go from here to Brighton without an accident.' I know that there are occasional railway accidents but they do not happen everyday. The law of mathematical

probability tells me that probably this train will take me without an accident to Brighton. Now that is not faith at all." "Or to put it another way" he says, "as we sit in the train, we're acting on the ground of experience of men and women who travel in trains. We see others doing the same thing. We know that they do it every day. Experience teaches us that on the whole it's safe to go on a journey in a train. You could say that we are acting upon an argument which is based upon the general observation of certain facts."

But Jeremy, here's a thing I want you to think about. He finds fault with that. We should find fault with that. Because what he says, if you go and look at Abraham Brother, you've been on a lot of planes. You ever climb on that plane and say, "this is hope without hope. I mean humanly speaking this thing is going down unless God comes through." You don't. He's right. No! You get on there and you think, "Well there are airplane crashes. Some don't make it. But the mathematical probability here is that it probably is going to." You see the faith of scripture is different. We don't work on the basis of mathematical probability or statistics or human observation. That isn't the faith that God calls us to. And that's important. Because there's going to be a temptation and there will be many others to come alongside you and get you to go in this direction of temptation, that look probability says this won't work out. You know business statistically in the business world you would never do something like this.

Beware brother! Beware! I mean you can have all manner of businessmen in the church but if they want to come in the church and operate the church by business tactics. I remember one time, we were looking at the possibility of needing a new building. And I said to the church we are not going to lead this church into debt. And some wise business man said, "Well in the business world, when you buy a new piece of property you go out and you get a mortgage." Well you know what I don't want to lead the church into that. And if God says He's going to supply all our needs, can we not trust Him? We saw hundreds of thousands of dollars in three weeks come into our church offering box for the sake of our new building. Did we have to go into debt? No! And you don't either. You do not have to walk through this world the way that the world walks through this world. And to get on an airplane and simply say, "Well, I hope because of some statistical probability that I'm going to make it to Brighton." That is not the faith of Scripture. The faith of scripture is Abraham saying, "Wow! I'm a hundred years old, my wife is ninety, but we've got the promises of God and so we're going to hope for something against hope, at least humanly speaking. We're going to believe God that these things are going to come to pass." Take the church in that direction.

God is not pleased by simple mathematical probability. God is pleased when we cling to Him and we embrace Him. And we trust Him. Even though humanly speaking it looks impossible! But because we're clinging to Him and to His promises. You see, brother. Going to be lots of temptation to trust the checkbook. You see it really is mathematical probability if you say, you know, you're considering supporting a missionary for a hundred dollars a month and you go to Michael and you say, "Hey Michael, have we had an extra hundred dollars a month come in for.." "Yeah. Yeah, we have. Last sixteen months, an extra hundred dollars has come in above all the bills we paid." You say, "Oh, well then we can give that to this missionary." Now I'm not saying necessarily that that would be wrong. But you recognize that's within the realm of mathematical probability. That well that's happened for sixteen months.

Brother, you know the story. I've told them to you. I mean there was a time when our church made increases and I went to Carlos and I said, "Carlos, how many months out of our existence?" He said, "Well like in the 84 months we've been a church, 4 months we've met that amount." For 12 straight months God, after that, God brought us everything that we needed. God can be trusted. Put Him to the test. He wants to be put to the test. Don't live in the safe realm of statistics and mathematical probability. Consistently lead this church to do something that if God doesn't come through you're going to fall flat on your face. Do that brother. Do it! Over and over and over again. Lead this church in faith. Trust God. Trust God! Not experience. Beware!

I tell you, beware! You remember Jonathan going up that mountain. He has his armor bearer. We're going up there. The Philistines are up there. Brother there will be ten thousand people telling you not to go up that mountain. It's not wise. For one there's a hoard of those guys up there! You're only two. You read it. They got to crawling. You do not want to go up there. You do not want to crawl up a mountainside to your enemies. You're going to be wasted out of breath, out of strength, exhausted. They can throw rocks down on your head as you're coming up. Don't do it brother! Don't go up there. It's not wise. It's not convenient. It's presumption! And there will be all manner of whisperers in your ear telling you that when you're confronted by something. Everytime you walk by faith it will be going against the grain. They'll be telling you. We're going to have two funerals tonight. Jonathan says "It's God" It's just like David going out there to Goliath. Humanly speaking. I mean they were, they were counting on, you know, feeding his body to the birds on one side and they were counting on a funeral on the other side. It was pretty much a hopeless situation. But you know in both cases, Jonathan and David, their trust was not in themselves. Their trust was in the Lord. Of course it's ridiculous to climb up the side of a mountain and confront your enemies that way. But when you look at the outcome nobody would say it was ridiculous.

But you know what? The thing is when you go into the thing, you don't know the outcome. That's the problem! Abraham See we can look back at Abraham and we know the outcome. We look back at Jonathan and we know the outcome. We look back at David and we know the outcome! The problem is when you go into it you don't know the outcome! And your own heart will waiver at times. It will. Brother be the man. Be the man. Play the man. Be the man that says, "There is a God in Israel and we're going to trust Him so we're moving forward." It's God that gives the victory. And He can give it to many. He can give it to few. You know those wise people that came along to John G Paton. "You don't want to go over there. You're going to be eaten by the Cannibals." They came along to William Carey. "We see no possibility of success."

And they'll come along to you too. Anybody that's ever wanted to step out trusting God. Brother, attempt great things for God. As was once said and you watch what God will do. Because what I have found is in leading our church I've probably wavered and not led us into some of the places that we should. But I can tell you this everytime that I have led the church where humanly speaking it was going to fail unless God came through. God has come through every single time. He has never left me hanging my head. We have a God in the scripture that says "He is a lifter of our heads." He will not leave His people who trust in Him ashamed. He will not! Brother as you go forward. Beware! Beware! Of faith killing Calvinism. I'm not telling you to

abandon the Doctrines of Grace. I'm not telling you that. You embrace those. You be willing to die for those. But I'm talking about that form of Reformed Theology out there those movements out there. That tends to kill faith! Not encourage it. Well, God is sovereign and if He's going to do it He's going to do it. That is not what we find in Scripture. That is not. Think big. Pray big. Why? Your God is big. Brother. When church leadership digs in for safety it will be the demise of your church. Don't do it. Don't do that. Listen, none have ever trusted God too much. Trust Him. Trust Him. Trust Him. To step out into that unknown. Where you can't, I mean you get to the edge, and you can't see. And you're having to step. For Christ. For His Kingdom. Step. Trust the Lord and step venture into that realm brother where you know.. . where you have to.. . when you're in prayer where, and I've been there, Lord, I'm leading the church to go in this direction. Because you'll find yourself in the position of Moses, where you feel like God wants us to go in this direction and the people are saying, "Well he hasn't told us that. And you know you coming in here and doing what you've done and going and talking to Pharaoh that has not worked for our good. In fact, ever since you put us on this venture it's gotten worse for us!" Because God will test you. He will test your faith.

I just watched a video of Ryan Fullerton. You know Ryan Fullerton was leading his church to trust the Lord in some big endeavor. And he said that the prayer meeting that they were going to have, where he was going to really try to stir up everybody's faith in this, he said like it was one of the least attended prayer meetings that they had. And it's like just... You know, God will test you as you seek to trust Him. He will test you. Attempt. Attempt. Don't. Don't let that faith diminish brother. Safety. When you make decisions because something is safe. Ugh. And you just dig in. You're satisfied.

Don't live on past victories either. It is not enough to trust God today and then to quit doing it tomorrow. But you can get to the place where well you know we did this in the past. "Ah! We planted a church down in Laredo and before that we did this and this and this.. ." And you get to the place where you go, "Ah now we can kick up our feet and we can coast." You know what, you got to fight the good fight of faith all the way to the end. All the way to the end. All the way. When it's protection and safety that we seek, oh brethren, it is our undoing. Jeremy it will be your undoing. Don't go there. Don't do it. When it's safety, when it's peace, when it's serenity, when it's comfort we seek and no faith is required, the people you pastor, I said this already but I'll say it again, the people here that you pastor will follow you into that. It will be your undoing. It will be a slow death.

The men in this book who have turned the world upside down, brethren you know what kind they were. They're the kind always all along the way, what did they do? They exchanged the safety for something else for hazardous life. But the safety, unbelief. Hazardous living, the kind that takes risk, there's faith there. There's faith. Safety and unbelief go together. They exchange those kinds of things. That inactivity for what? For this, the hazards of God trusting, God believing progress. That is how the church has been. All you have to do is look through history. All you have to do is look through history at every single time there has been any sort of major missionary advance any sort of church that has really been a light in this world every time there is some great evangelistic outreach in this world all through history! Every time there has been a real upheaval! Guaranteed! Look! Open up your history books! Open up the Christian

history and read! Somebody was raised up by God who had faith. Always! Always! Always trusting God! Trust God.

And brother, I'll tell you this. Trusting God might get you killed. Or it might get somebody in your church killed. And Jesus never said it wouldn't. He never said that. We want to protect our people. But our people are expendable for the Glory of God. And when I say expendable I'm not talking about throwing them away. I'm talking about what more glorious death would they ever die than to die for Christ. It might get you killed. It might! Jesus never said it wouldn't. But brother would it not be better to die trusting, trusting God? Then to be caged up safe and secure within your calvinistic walls of a church who won't put their trust in a sovereign God of scripture! Brother, that's far better! Far better! Far better. Brother, play the man. As you pastor this church. You have a big God. Don't ever forget it. You have a big God. And this book is full of His promises. You latch on to those promises. Because the John G Patons and the William Careys despite what the crowd had to say, they latched onto the promises. The Hudson Taylors. The men and the women that have turned this world upside down. They laid hold on those promises, and they found they had a big God. It cost many of them their lives. But though it cost you your life that doesn't diminish the greatness of God. In fact, when you'll choose to trust God even to the death there's no better way to glorify Him than to give Him all. Brother, that's my charge to you. Lead the church in faith.