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Through His Love

Guests:	Irene and Domingo Garcia
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Bob: After God had done a dramatic work in Domingo and Irene Garcia's marriage, the two of them decided to adopt. What they didn't realize was that God's plans were bigger than their plans were.

Irene: We were sitting in the room. The social worker said, "I have a boy that's six years old." She says, "But I also have his brother," and "Would you consider taking both of them?" Domingo said, "Yes, we would." I remember thinking: "We didn't talk about it! We didn't talk about it!" I'm thinking, "Lord—one! We said one!" All of a sudden, my heart was pounding; and I thought, "I'm in too deep."

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. What Irene Garcia didn't realize, when she thought was in too deep, was that she was still in the shallow end of the pool God had for her. We'll hear her story today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today.* Thanks for joining us. You know, I have to wonder if couples—who would look at their life and at their marriage and say: "It's been a bumpy ride. God's been at work, but we have a lot of baggage in the past,"—if those couples would say: "We need to play it safe, from here on out, because we've had all the bumps we can handle in the early years. We just need kind of no turbulence all the way to the finish line."

Dennis: Oh, I get that. Yes. "Let's just take it easy and coast all the way in." But the couple we have with us today didn't coast; in fact, if you're a listener and you don't have a seatbelt on, you could be in for a dangerous ride if you don't have a seatbelt on.

Irene and Domingo Garcia join us on *FamilyLife Today*. Domingo, Irene, welcome back.

Irene: Thank you.

Domingo: Thank you so much for having us.

Dennis: Irene has written a book called *Rich in Love*. You're about to hear, in the words of a famous broadcaster, "the rest of the story."

Bob: That's 1 Timothy 6—where you pulled the title for the book; right?—where it says "teach those who are wealthy in this world to be rich in love"?

Irene: Yes.

Bob: Right—it's a great verse.

Dennis: You guys did have a rocky beginning. Your first decade of marriage was, as you describe it, "a mucky, yucky mess." [Laughter]

Bob: Well, there's alcoholism—you were drinking regularly—right, Domingo?

Domingo: Yes sir, I was.

Bob: There was domestic violence going on. You'd had a couple of kids. Irene, you were trying to plot your way out—figured, if you could save enough money, then just be done with this.

But you had one of your customers, at the hair salon where you worked—who discipled you—led you to Christ and discipled you. Domingo, you wound up coming to faith after being arrested on a DUI. You guys got into a good solid church—got discipled along the way.

Your family changed / your marriage changed. That's the point where I think a lot of couples would say: "I like the smooth road a whole lot better than the bumpy road. Let's just stay on this kind of smooth, clear highway."

Dennis: "Yes, we have two kids—you know, it's kind of the perfect family."

Bob: Right.

Dennis: That's the way America kind of views it.

Bob: So Irene, you apparently like roller-coasters better than you like smooth roads because, at some point in all of this, God put an idea in your heart to expand your family.

Irene: He did. Domingo had been gone a lot—so it was usually just me and the boys. I felt empty. Obviously, God was working on my heart. I just thought, "Well, I would really like to adopt,"—I couldn't have any more kids. So I actually had mentioned it to Mary, and Mary told me, "Well, pray about it, honey."

Bob: Mary is the woman who had led you to Christ?

Irene: Yes. Anyway, I had asked Domingo about it—and asked him how he felt about it. He said: "Well, Irene, things are going really well right now. Give it some time—we'll talk about it later."

Dennis: Did you think she was losing her mind, Domingo?

Domingo: No, I understood her emptiness; but I just felt we weren't ready. I felt we had a lot of healing to do yet, and I just didn't feel ready.

Dennis: So what happened?

Irene: Well, I continued to pray about it. Then, one day, Domingo said: "Irene, you know what? Go ahead and call the county. Go ahead and pursue adoption if you really feel that's something you want to do." I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" I couldn't believe—I was dancing—I was just so excited.

So I did. I called the county and got the ball rolling. Then the social worker came—we had a meeting. She shared the story about how there was really a need for kids / and Mexican children to be adopted. We'd be put right on the top of the list, and she liked us. So, we started this journey.

Well, Domingo had told me that he didn't think they were going to give us any kids—so he went along with it. [Laughter] He thought this would pacify me. We'd go through this process and then get to the point and they'd say: "Well, you know what? I'm sorry—you're not going to get a child."

Bob: Okay, hang on. So, when you said, "Yes, honey, call the county," you were thinking, "This will never happen."

Domingo: Yes, I did. I knew my past and our track record. I felt they were just going to reject us.

Bob: As soon as they see your rap sheet, from when you were 15 years old,—

Domingo: I was used to that. [Laughter]

Bob: —they're never going to let anybody into your house; right?

Dennis: This had been how long since you had been locked up on a DUI?

Domingo: Boy, I have to think here.

Irene: About a year-and-a-half later.

Domingo: Is that all? Yes.

Dennis: Wow.

Domingo: Things change really quickly. You know, Irene was persistent. Sometimes—Irene's a very emotional lady. Sometimes, she'll have a whim, one way or the other; and

it'll go away—but this wasn't going away. So, we said, "Well, let's pursue it." I figured it wouldn't go anywhere—I really did.

Bob: So, when the social worker said, "You know, we may have a child for you," what did you think?

Dennis: Now it wasn't just any child—it was a *fragile* child.

Irene: Yes.

Domingo: Being the logical man that I am, I said: "Well, wait a minute, Irene. Let's think about this,"—this is all a plot to escape—it was: "Let's think through—we're both working…dah, dah, dah." I said, "We can take in another child, but we probably couldn't handle a special-needs child and one that would require a lot of time / a lot of care—that kind of stuff. It's just not going to fit."

I kind of convinced her of that. We agreed that we would take everything but a special-needs child. I don't know if you've ever seen a form you can fill out—these forms are worse than buying a house. You have all this information. The only thing we wrote down is—we wanted a baby girl—beyond that—other than we couldn't have special needs. But we got a call after that. I'll let Irene tell this story—she likes to tell that part of the story.

Irene: The funny thing was—the social worker called Domingo first to tell him that they had a little baby girl, who had the possibility of brain damage. He called me up; and he said, "Irene, guess what? The social worker just called me. She said they have a baby girl." Well, all I heard was "baby girl." I didn't hear the brain damage part because I just wanted the baby. That's what I wanted—was a baby. He said, "We have a meeting." I'm thinking, "This is really going to happen."

Anyway, we go for this meeting. She starts to tell us about this little girl—and she was very ill and very sick—failure to thrive.

They didn't think she'd make a year. She said, "I really feel, if I put this baby in your household, you'll stimulate her / you'll love her and she'll be fine." She said, "Let me bring the baby. Meanwhile, you guys go out to breakfast."

As we were sitting at the table, Domingo is starting to talk. I'm thinking, "Something's wrong." Well anyway, he bent down to pray for our food. As he was praying, he sat up and he said, "Irene, I can't believe this!" I'm thinking: "Oh my, here it is. We're not going to keep this baby."

He said, "I am *so* sorry." I'm thinking, "Ah…" He looked at me, and there were tears in his eyes. He said: "Here I was going to pray, and then it hit me. I committed my life to God. Here God is giving me this gift / this child, and I'm ready to figure out a way how I'm going to get out of it. I'm sitting here, thinking, 'How can I get out of this gracefully?'" He said, "God's giving me this baby—this innocent victim—and I'm saying, 'No.'"

He said, “Irene, forgive me.” He said: “From this day forward, I will do whatever I have to. If this baby can’t walk, can’t talk, can’t eat—I will take this baby. I’ll push her in a wheelchair / I’ll do whatever I need to do. Never again will I reject a gift from God like this.” He asked for forgiveness. He prayed, and then we met the baby. That was it—we were in love.

Bob: Domingo—

Dennis: Your life really changed, Domingo.

Bob: What did you have for breakfast?—is what I want to know—because something—I mean, what a remarkable moment.

Domingo: It was just conviction. I went to pray—the words wouldn’t come out. They would not come out.

Dennis: This is the story we usually hear—where, more than likely, it is the wife and the mom who wants to adopt—and the dad, who’s dragging his heels, feeling a lot of responsibility. I think what you just demonstrated for men is: “Are you going to walk by faith? Are you going to respond to what God’s doing, and are you going to trust Him in the midst of those circumstances?”

Tell us about Esther.

Irene: Well, she was a handful. She was this itty, bitty little thing. She had grand mal seizures. One time, we almost lost her—she stopped breathing, and the ambulance came. I remember, on the ride to the hospital, thinking, “Lord, why would You give us this baby and now You’re taking her?” because we thought we were losing her—that she was dying.

I remember my husband—he looked at me—he grabbed my hand; and he said: “Irene! We’ve had this baby for 18 months. Instead of saying, ‘Why are you taking it, Lord?’ we need to say, ‘Thank you for sharing her.’”

I looked at this man—I’m thinking, “This is the new creature in Christ.” I mean, he had *just* become a Christian. He hadn’t been a Christian very long, and I realized what a man of God I was married to. I realized that he was right—I needed to be thankful. We continued on the quest.

She ended up being okay; but they had drugged her up really badly, and we were having a lot of problems. Her crying kept her from breathing.

She’d go into these fits—and in the crying process, she’d quit breathing. In that process, she’d have a grand mal seizure; and she’d fall to the floor. They were horrible.

I remember, one day, just getting on my knees and praying: “Lord, what can we do to make a difference? There has to be something we can do.” It was then that He said, “Teach her to blow on your finger.” I know that sounds weird; but if I put my finger up and I’d say, “Blow, Esther, blow,” she would look at my finger and she’d start to blow on it. When she’d start to blow on my finger, she’d get her air back, and then she wouldn’t go into the seizure.

The longer she could go without having a seizure, the doctors said the better it would be that they would cease—you have to go, I guess, for a period of time—but anyway, we ended up taking her off all meds. We were able to control her seizures by blowing on my finger or our finger. Then, within a year, she no longer had seizures any more. She was mentally delayed; but the grand mal seizures were just adding more to it. So—

Bob: Now, I have to tell you—we talked about a bumpy early years of your marriage—and then you make the courageous decision to adopt a special-needs daughter. What you’ve just described—if I was in your situation, I would say, “I think we’ve done enough.” You know? I would say: “I think we made some sacrifices here. We’re going to take Esther and raise her, but we’re pretty much done.” That’s not what you felt or thought; is it?

Irene: No, it wasn’t. Once again, we felt that we needed to help Esther. We ended up thinking that, if we adopted a sibling for her, it would be stimulating for her. So, we decided to go again—and go to the county and ask to adopt another child. Well, it happened really quickly. We were sitting in the room; and the social worker said: “I have a boy that’s six years old, but I also have his brother,” and “Would you consider taking both of them?” Domingo said, “Yes, we would.”

I remember thinking, “We didn’t talk about it! We didn’t talk about it!” I’m thinking, “Lord—one! We said one! Now, I’m thinking, like you are saying, ‘But I have Esther!’”; you? All of a sudden my heart was pounding. I thought: “I’m in too deep. Okay, this is far enough. Let’s back up here.” Then I realized that I was wrong—and watching my husband be the example—I thought, “No, this is what we need to do.”

Dennis: Now, wait a second, because, initially, it was Domingo who was dragging his feet; in fact, he was actually taking his feet and wanting to find a way to escape. [laughter] *Now*, you’re the one who wants to escape.

Irene: Yes.

Bob: Domingo, you’re over here, going, “Yes, we’ll take two boys.” What’s going on there?

Domingo: Well, we had seen the difference it makes in an innocent life.

Both of our boys, who were now probably ten and twelve, had to sacrifice tremendously—their whole life changed—we took in a special needs child. But I saw it all for the better—what it was teaching them—because we had so much. God has

blessed us with so much that we had, at that point. We said, “We need to share that.” So, I wanted to continue to do that. I don’t want to hop on a new story; but it was great for the boys to see that—to grow up with a special-needs sibling. It really was.

Bob: So how’d you say yes, Irene?

Irene: I said “Yes.” Maybe everybody thought I was saying a normal “Yes”; but, inside, I was thinking: “I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to do this.”

But I knew it was the right thing to do. God had shown me over and over: “You step out in faith, and you’re going to grow. You step out in faith, you’re going to see Me at work.” And I really liked seeing God at work. So, I decided to close my eyes, hold His hand, and let Him take me where He was going to take me.

And then this is when we had Joseph and Alfred—they were rambunctious. They were difficult—especially Joseph. He was the older one of seven siblings. He wanted to control our house, our family, me. He had every bad habit. Every unimaginable thing that he could do, he would do. When you adopt older children, you don’t have those sweet memories.

Dennis: Yes.

Irene: I always say it’s like credit in the bank. It’s like you have all these sweet memories. Then, as they do these awful things, some memories are taken away; but new ones fill back up. But here—you have everything negative. I’m looking at this boy; and I remember, one day, just crying. I called my husband and I said: “I don’t love this boy. He’s *my son*—we’ve adopted him. I look at him, and I still don’t have the emotion of love. I don’t love him.”

I was feeling so ugly about who I was in Christ because God says we are to love—we are to love. What I wasn’t realizing is—God wants us to love through Him. I couldn’t love in my own strength—it had to be in His strength.

And Domingo, being the man of wisdom now—he said: “Irene, you are loving this boy.

When you feed him, when you clothe him, when you care for him, when you train him, you’re doing *agape l*ove. That is the love God has called you to do, and you need to pursue that. You’ll see, eventually, that love—that *agape* love will turn into emotion. You’ll see. Trust me. Just keep being obedient. You’ll see that, one day, you’ll love your boy.” And it happened.

Dennis: I think, when many folks adopt—and I’ve said this many times on the broadcast / our regular listeners know what I’m about to say—we typically think of it as this beautiful photograph of smiling faces, and it’s a story that has just a great ending.

Bob: That the rescued kids are going to just go, “Thank you so much for the great sacrifice you’ve made to provide for me,”—that they’re going to understand that in some way.

Dennis: Yes. And yet, this story doesn’t have quite that twist. What happened to Joseph?

Irene: Well, I was going to camp. I had two daughters—one that couldn’t go to camp alone, and one that I had to be at camp with because she could cause a ruckus.

Dennis: And how old was Joseph at this time?

Irene: He was 13.

Dennis: So, he’d been with you for four years.

Irene: Yes. I was on my way to camp. Domingo had hurt his back—so Domingo was inside the van, waiting for me, as the bus came. My son said, “Mom, I’ll take your bags.” So, this little guy came—took my bags—and he walked me to the bus. I looked at him and I remember saying to him: “Son! I am madly in love with you. I have fallen madly in love with you! I am so proud to be your mother. You’re flesh of my flesh.” I looked at this charismatic little boy, and he just smiled and glowed. I just remember thinking the words that Domingo had said, “One day, you’re going to have that emotion.”

So, I was on my way to camp. I said goodbye, I hugged him, and I kissed him all over his face.

While I was at camp one night, a camp counselor came up—and came to wake me up and said, “You have a phone call down below.”

I know my husband—and I know my husband would never call me—so I knew something had happened. I don’t know why, but I knew something had happened to Joseph.

As I was driving down, all of a sudden, we got to the bottom. I saw Domingo and my two boys. They were standing there, and they looked at me. I knew Joseph was dead—I just knew it. I remember walking to my husband, and I asked him what happened. He said, “Irene, there was an accident.” He started to tell me that Joseph had strangled and had died that night. I can’t even explain it.

You know, all of a sudden, my world just stopped. My knees felt like they were rubber, and I just wanted to die. I let out this sob. I just couldn’t believe: “Lord, why did You allow this? Why would You give me this boy, teach me to love him, and now You just take him out of our life?”

I went home that night. After a few days, I cried and cried.

I remember thinking, “I never got to say goodbye to Joseph.” My daughter-in-law said: “Mom, you’re the only one that got to say goodbye. You said, ‘Goodbye, Joseph.’”

When I did say goodbye to Joseph, I told him I loved him. But it was something that God really brought to my mind that day. He said—when I pleaded, “Why did You take him?”—and then God said: “It’s because I needed to show you how to love. I gave you this boy to teach you how to love.” It was through this boy that God taught me that it didn’t matter their habits—it didn’t matter how ugly it seemed—it didn’t matter that I didn’t love him the moment they walked in my door.

All that mattered was I could love them through Christ’s love. His love was pouring—and it pours out, and it pours out. So, it was through His love, I could love. My love was conditional, but God’s love wasn’t. God showed me, “I gave you this boy, Irene, to show you how I was going to teach you to love.”

It was through Joseph and his death that God taught me that it didn’t matter what kind of child came in my house after that—that I would be able to love them through Christ’s love. That was the lesson that God taught me through Joseph.

Dennis: I listen to your story—and I can’t help but reflect back on how a child, whether it’s your own biological child or your own child through adoption that you choose to bring into your family—a child’s a risk.

Irene: Yes.

Dennis: It’s dangerous to love.

And yet, I think a part of what God has in mind—over in James, Chapter 1, where He says, “It’s good to go near the orphan and the widow in their distress,”—because I think, in those moments, we go near the heart of God; and we do learn how to love.

I know the rest of your story. We don’t have time to finish out telling the rest of your story; but not long after you lost Joseph, you went on to adopt Marie—who, at 12 years of age, had been molested—Felix at the age of 14—and Doreen, who was a little girl who wanted to be a boy. Risk again—

Irene: Yes.

Dennis: —love again. And it didn’t stop there. Before you guys were done—and this is the amazing thing about the redemption story we’ve heard this week—you two went on, not only to have two biological children of your own, but adopt 17 children and to be foster care parents to another 13. That’s what I call risky love.

I just have to tell you—it’s a remarkable story of redemption—just to have heard God’s salvation of you, Domingo—and your obedience, and then to become a man of God, who begins to call his wife up—to lead her and to love her—and for you to follow,

Irene—and for God to use your family to display God's love, His grace, His mercy to others. Thank you, guys, for being obedient.

Irene: Thank you.

Domingo: Thank you.

Michelle: *FamilyLife Today* is brought to you by FamilyLife in Little Rock, Arkansas. And although FamilyLife is located in the United States of America, we understand that our cultures vary but the issues facing us are similar. We all have joys in life, we all struggle and we all want to love and be loved. And we want your family, your marriage and your relationships to succeed.

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I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our global broadcast manager Rhonda Street. I also want to thank our editor Larry Loraine. For Dennis Rainey and Bob Lepine, I'm Michelle Hill. Have a great weekend and let me invite you to join us again on Monday for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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