FamilyLife Today® Radio Transcript

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Called to Christ

Guests:	Irene and Domingo Garcia
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Bob: Irene Garcia was 16 and pregnant when she and her husband Domingo were first married. It was a marriage that did not begin well.

Irene: It was the second day after we were married. They were planning this reception for us with Domingo's family. People came into the house that weren't family, and I saw a look of change in Domingo. Domingo said: "Irene, I need to talk to you. You need to go to the room. I don't want you to come out. You need to stay in the room. I want you to stay in the room the rest of the evening."

My only thought was: "Why?! What do you mean I can't go out? This is a reception for us!" And then, the next thing I remember is just his fist across my face—but I was 16 [Emotion in voice]. Nobody had ever said to me what marriage was supposed to be like. So, I thought this was part of it.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine.

We'll hear about God's transforming work in the lives of Irene and Domingo Garcia today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. If I were to sit you down with a young couple and you were to hear their story—that they'd got married when they were both 16 years old, pregnant—

Dennis: Right.

Bob: —that, early in the marriage, there was abuse—the husband was abusing the wife—that they didn't have a whole lot of hope for their marriage—what kind of odds would you give that marriage? Or what kind of hope would you point that couple to?

Dennis: Well, you know the percentages don't matter because God is the God of the power that works best in a graveyard—where things are dead and need to be brought alive. And that's the story of Domingo and Irene Garcia, who join us again with their story, here on *FamilyLife Today*. Irene, Domingo, welcome back.

Domingo: Thank you very much.

Irene: Thank you.

Dennis: It really was a mess that you were in.

Irene: We were in a mess!

Dennis: And you write about it in your book, *Rich in Love*, which, interestingly, is subtitled: *When God Rescues Messy People*. I might say, "…in messy circumstances."

Bob: And really, the first decade of your marriage was a messy—just a messy season; wasn't it?

Irene: It was very messy.

Bob: There was a point in that first ten-year period where something pivotal happened in your life, Irene. It was one of your clients—

Irene: Yes.

Bob: —who—you're a hairdresser; right?

Irene: Yes, I am.

Bob: So, you're cutting hair with somebody. She's just asking: "How is your marriage? How are your kids?"—that kind of stuff?

Irene: She was a client of mine. There was a group of women that would come in; and they all were going to Grace Community Church, back then. They would come in, and they all would talk about Jesus. I'd like to tell you that they all had these great walks, but they all didn't.

The one particular woman who did—her name was Mary Barshaw. She came and sat in my chair, and she just loved on me.

She just took me under her wing, and I saw something different. She had peace. She had joy. She had a wonderful family, and I wanted that. She was loved by her husband and respected, and I wanted that. But I used to tell her things—just to shake her boots. I used to say things to her, just to see how she'd respond. She—

Bob: Things like what? What would you say?

Irene: Well, I probably shouldn't be able to say them on this media. They weren't very nice things—just some things that we were doing and things that were not proper.

Things that I would say to my husband that weren't good / or things about my husband that weren't good; but, you know, they were not kind. They were not—

Dennis: You are trying to provoke her—

Irene: Yes.

Dennis: —see what kind of response you could get from her?

Irene: Exactly.

Bob: See—if these words I use and this vocabulary—see if that throws her a little bit?

Irene: Yes, and I—you know, there was—I would tell her about some movies we'd seen that were not good. Anyway, I just wanted to see what she would do.

This godly woman—she'd just say, "Okay, honey; but this is what God says." I'd think, "Well, what does say God say about this?"

So, I would just drill her, and drill her, and drill her. She would just come back with godly remarks and Scripture. She'd say, "That's okay," and she never agreed with me because I would tell her that my husband—how my husband and my relationship was. She would say, "That's okay, honey. You know, you need to love him." I'm thinking: "You don't know, lady. You come from your *Kumbaya* world. You have *no* idea what it's really like."

So, anyway, as time went on, she would invite me to her house. I—we had two kids by then. She would invite me. I'd say, "Okay"; and then, I'd back out at the last minute. Well, one particular time, I thought, "I need to be right, and I need to go to her house." I went to lunch. The funny thing was her husband was there. I'm thinking, "What is this man doing, here, in the middle of the day?" Well, it was a plan!

We had lunch with him. She ended up getting up from the table, and he started to talk to me. He just, point blank, said, "Are you a Christian?

"Do you have a relationship with Jesus?" He, point blank, confronted me on the gospel message. I remember he said: "Do you *want* to know Jesus? Do you *want* to become a Christian? Do you *want* to follow Him? Do you want to give up your life and follow Him?" I'm thinking, "Yes, I do." I knew I wanted what they had.

So, he said, "Okay, pray this prayer with me." He bowed down, and he prayed. Everything that he said I accepted, and I prayed with him. The only thing was I didn't tell him. So, he didn't know that I had accepted Christ that day. I—then, later, I thought, "Where is Mary?" Well, she had to have been in the kitchen praying—she had to be.

Well, anyway, I ended up leaving their house and thanking them. I ended up moving salons—so, I didn't see her anymore. So, she didn't know I had come to know the Lord. Then, one day, I went to church. I realized that I had come to know the Lord—that I had made a profession of faith. So, I called her. I said, "I need your help, Mary.

"I will do your hair every week if you come in and teach me about God. In return, I will do your hair." Well, she would have come in anyway, but I didn't know that.

So, she came in—this woman discipled me over 25 years. It was, then, that I said, "Did you know that I prayed that prayer?" She said, "No, honey, I never knew." Well, then, when she found out I was a Christian—she started talking to me, and teaching me, and sharing the gospel with me, and sharing Scripture with me—and just she was that Titus 2 woman.

Bob: Domingo, did you have any idea that this discipleship was going on or that there had been a spiritual change in your wife's life?

Domingo: Yes. She had mentioned that she was meeting somebody and talking to somebody, but I had no interest in it. I was going on about my own life, at that point.

Bob: Were you seeing any difference in her?

Domingo: Yes, I had started to see some changes in her, where she—I could see she was trying to control—to stay her tongue—where she would just lash out continuously at me with different things—and just a calmness.

Then, she was constantly reading different books—and even trying to read them to me and trying to get my interest in salvation and things that were going on. And so, seeds were being planted in my life, at that point.

Dennis: You'd been married now for nine years. What condition was your marriage in?

Irene: A wreck! I was already making plans—I was saving money, and I was on my way out. I was pretty much on my way out. We'd gotten to the point that our relationship was so caustic, and my children were watching that.

In fact, one night, it was really a bad night—when Domingo's leg just broke, and—

Bob: Now, wait. How'd that happen?

Irene: Well, he had come home from drinking. It was going to be one of those really bad evenings. I always knew when it would happen. He walked into the room, and I was pretending to be asleep. He walked in, and he was pretty wasted. He said, "Irene, what are you doing?" He started to kind of badger me a bit. I just remember sitting up and looking at him, and I just spewed the most vile things to him—I just lost all control.

And I remember looking at his face. It was like it was somebody else. I remember thinking: “Oh, dear God, please save me tonight. I’m going to die,” because he had that look. And he, all of a sudden, just turned his body. He was going to come at me; and, all of a sudden, he fell to the ground. I heard this crack, and I’m thinking, “His leg just broke.” And I’m thinking, “No way!” But it did. He fell and went to sleep on the floor.

The next morning, he said, “Irene, I think my leg is broken.” I just said, “Well, I don’t care,” and I walked out to go to work. I got the keys to his car and moved them because his car was blocking mine. Just to be spiteful, I parked it *way* down the street so that he would have to walk all the way over there. So, he had to have my two boys hold him up and take him to his car.

He went to the doctor, and he had broken his leg in three places—the fibula and the tibia—I mean, right in half / I mean, it was broken. Both of us just kind of took that day out of our minds.

We never thought about it again until many years later—we thought, “God broke your leg!”

Dennis: Your marriage was, for all practical purposes, done.

Irene: Yes, it was.

Dennis: At that point, Domingo, God did something to get your attention in a big-time way when you were arrested for a DUI.

Domingo: Yes, He did. That was one of several DUI’s, yes. I had, along with being an alcoholic—I was a workaholic. So, I worked a lot. I never sat still. I was just going 24/7. And for me, to be put in jail for a week was like an eternity. Through that process of every day—God humbled me to the point that I realized, “Why did I really, really drink?” I realized why an older brother and a little sister both drank themselves to death—it had a lot to do with our childhood.

I realized that I was trying to forget my childhood and the things that happened to me—through the fact that my dad was never there and all the things that my family suffered without.

Then, I realized those exact things were the things I was doing to my children. I had two boys at home and that they were probably going to do it to their kids. I envisioned this endless downward spiral from generation to generation—just: “Somebody’s got to stop this.”

That’s at the point where I said, “I need help.” And back again—reviewing everything I knew about God—I attempted to pray to the best of my ability / the knowledge that I had

of the Lord. It was more of a bargaining; but I said, “You restore my family and take the desire of drink away from me, I will follow You—whatever that means. I know I don’t know what it means, but whatever it means I will do it. I will do that.” And that’s what happened. No sooner than I finished that than my name came over the PA—I was released. Things totally changed after that.

Dennis: You went home to pursue Irene instead of to abuse her. You went after her heart, at that point.

Domingo: Yes, sir, I did.

Dennis: Irene, what did you think about that? Here is your husband, coming out of jail.

He’s coming after you to love you, as best he knew how, then. Yet, you’re feeling horribly unsafe, unprotected, hurt, wounded—probably, very distrustful of him.

Irene: How did I feel? Mad at God. I’d already come to know the Lord, and a godly woman was discipling me. I remember she said, “Irene, you have to be quiet, and you have to win your husband over.” We were going through 1 Peter 3:1-4. She kept saying: “You know what? He’s not a believer, but you still have to love him. And you have to do the things that God has called you to do.”

Well, for ten years, I was planning my way of escape. I was going to leave. I was right there. I had already talked to a lawyer—I mean—I was done. I really—my heart was done, and I had made a decision that I was not going to forgive him.

Well, I was at work; and I got a call. He was on the other line. He said, “I just want you to know, I’m never going to drink again.”

I remember thinking, “Yes, right!” But then, there was something gnawing at me. He said, “Irene”—he said, “I need you to forgive me.” And I didn’t want to forgive him. I was so busy looking at his sin, when I first became a Christian, that my sin looked pretty good. I wasn’t focused on the cross, but I was focused on him.

I realized that this was the crossroads of my walk with God. I needed to trust God and forgive him. It was really funny because he said to me: “Irene, I’ve just given you the ten worst years of my life. Would you like me to give the best years to someone else? I feel like you deserve them.” That kind of struck a nerve down me. I’m thinking, “What do you mean somebody else?”

Well, anyway, I got off the phone. I went to go do my client, who happened to be the lady who had been discipling me—and she was a godly, Christian woman. She said, “Irene, you have to forgive your husband.” I remember saying: “I’m not going to forgive him! I don’t have to forgive him.” She said, “Honey, yes, you do have to forgive him.

“You’re a Christian, and he’s asking you for forgiveness.”

Well, anyway, as I drove home that day, I was really mad. I used to pray that God would just take him—have him drive off the cliff or whatever it would be—but just take him and give me a new husband that I thought I deserved. And God did.

You know, He ended up changing Domingo. I thank God for the Spirit who mediates our prayer. As I was praying, “God take my husband,” I believe by the time those prayers reached God’s ears, it was: “Change this man. Make him a new creature.” So, as I was driving home, it was like I was wrestling with Jesus. He said, “You will forgive.” And I was battling.

I realized: “You’re right. You stretched out your arms for me, Lord. And you stretched them out for him too. And if I want to walk your walk, I have to forgive.” And so, I did. I forgave. On the way home, I remember praying. I said, “I will forgive him.” And then, we spoke; and I did forgive Domingo.

I asked God—I got on my knees and asked God to forgive me because my view of Christianity was really skewed. I thought my sin was not as bad as his sin. So, that day, I forgave him and decided to trust God.

Dennis: And something remarkable happened in your heart.

Irene: It was changed. I felt—well, I didn’t fall in love with him right away. I forgave him; but then, I continued to pray, “Lord, I don’t love this man.” In fact, I hated my husband. I feel embarrassed to say that, but I did. I hated him. And even though I forgave him, I still didn’t have that love for him.

But I just started praying, “Lord, if You would just show me how to love my husband and if you would just teach me to love my husband…” About a year later, I remember sitting across the table—I looked at this man, and I realized I had fallen madly in love with him.

The funny thing is—Domingo shares his testimony a lot. He always says, “When my wife could keep her mouth shut, I knew there had to be a God.”

You know, that’s really kind of funny; but I would use my words as my weapons. You know, Domingo was strong; and I couldn’t match him physically. So, I thought, “When he’s sober, I’m going to let him have it.”

But He did—He taught me to forgive him. Then, about a year later, He put that love inside of me. And it gets better, and better, and better. We’ll be married 46 years.

Dennis: There is hope.

Irene: There is *so much hope*. If God can come in and fix *our* mess—because we were

in the muck / we were two ugly creatures—if God could come in and fix our mess—because it was a mess / it was yucky / it was awful—He can fix anybody's mess.

Bob: Domingo, this wasn't an overnight transformation—I don't imagine. It's not like, all of a sudden, everything was fine at home. You guys had some patterns that had to be unlearned and had some spiritual growth that had to happen in both of your lives; didn't you?

Domingo: Yes, sir, very much, sir. I mean, I believe that salvation is instantaneous, positionally, but the practical part takes time. It takes a lot of healing.

I felt I'd made a mess of my 20-some years that I was in control. It was time to give God the control. I realize that, in Him—He did take away my desire to drink. It just stopped, and I say I had no more desire to drink whatsoever. It was gone completely.

But yet, I knew I had a responsibility, from there on, to find out what it meant to follow God. I had no clue what that meant. So, I started to give up my—changing my calendar around and started to go to church to learn what that meant / what was expected of me. I didn't know what was expected of me.

As I learned things / as I started reading and going through the Bible and everything—just one step at a time—started changing, started changing, started changing. And my boys loved it. By no time, they were just following me. They had had a void for a dad anyway. We were out, doing all kinds of great things. We were—

At work—I used to work—I remember, prior to my salvation, I was working, day and night, sometimes. I would—I think, one year, I was gone 48 weekends out of the year—just traveling and different things.

So, I said, "Okay, I won't—I need to be home." So, I went, and I said: "Hey, I can only work 40 hours a week. If that's not good enough for you, that's fine—I'll leave. I'll drop the career / change everything." He said: "No, we'll take what we can get. If 40 hours is all you can give us, that's what we'll take." So, that drastically changed. I was home at 5:30 every day.

Dennis: What did you do with Irene? You went after her heart to love her. Explain how different you were with her after your conversion.

Domingo: I realized my responsibility to make her number two in my life—should I say, after Christ—and started cultivating the relationship, pursuing her, doing—the Bible says you have to earn trust. I knew she no longer trusted me. And I had to do things to earn that. So, everything I said—I made sure that I did—that I would do—whether it be home at 5:30, whether it be doing this—the promises we made and everything we did.

And we built some great memories. We had so much—ten years of a disastrous marriage—that I had—I felt like we needed to build some fond memories.

So, we went out—and I remember we bought a camping conversion van, and a boat, and motorcycles. We just went out and played for a year and did all kinds of fun—spent time together, just every weekend, and doing all these neat things.

Dennis: Irene, he said that he noticed the ability for you to control your tongue. [Laughter] What did you notice about him that struck you as he began to pursue Christ?

Irene: I think what I loved about him was watching how passionate he was becoming for his love for God—I mean—he did a 180. To this day, I've never met anybody who was walking one way and turned around completely and walked the other way. He was becoming a man of God—he was studying the Word, and he was growing. He started to woo me—I guess you could say—and he started doing things. He started to cherish who I was, and I was valuable to him. And to be loved and to love is an amazing thing.

He changed so much that I knew God was in his life, and I knew God had His hand on him. So, I knew that, if I held onto his hand—that he was holding onto God's hand—we were going to go in the right direction. So, I surrendered. That was tough because I don't surrender easily, but I knew that God had given me this man. He was a new creature, and I was going to do everything to fall in love with him—that I could do. God filled me with that desire, but I had to also do my part. He wooed, and he won because I'm still madly in love with him.

Bob: Did it take ten years?—because he talks about ten years of a bad marriage, and now, he has to repair the years that the locusts had eaten. How long before you were looking at him and going, "God gave me a new husband"?

Irene: Well, you know, when he started to change—it happened so quickly that he did these big changes—like he stopped drinking. So, it wasn't really that difficult because he was like two people.

When he was drinking, he was ugly; but when he was sober, he was beautiful. And so, they were so extreme. So, it wasn't hard because I knew that side of him. There was that side of him. We never talked about it, but there was that beautiful side of him. He was an amazing dad. He *never* hurt my kids. He was such a good dad. So, when I saw that he was trying and God was working in him, I knew that he—God was taking him on a journey, and I didn't want to get left behind—is the bottom line!

Dennis: Well, this is a love story that doesn't end here. Truthfully, Bob started today's broadcast by asking me a question, "What kind of chance would you give a couple who were married at 16—had to get married—there was abuse—emotional / physical—

Bob: —"no pattern for how to survive a marriage."

Dennis: No, but if you asked me, Bob, "What would you think of that couple, who started out that way—went on to become parents and foster care parents of 32 children?" I would say, "Apart from God—no chance." [Laughter]

Bob: You'd say, "We ought to get them on the radio,"—that's what you'd say.

Dennis: I'd say, "I want to tell that story!" [Laughter] And there is more to this story; but what I want the listener to hear: "Regardless of your circumstances, regardless of your track record, regardless of your spouse's track record, there is a God. He cares about you."

Irene: Yes, He does.

Dennis: "He *does* show up in peoples' lives, continuously. He's there. He is at work. You need to trust Him, and you need to be a part of a growing, Christian community—a church that's supports you / that's discipling you so you know how to respond to these circumstances; but you need to hang in there and not quit."

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 and I invite you to join us again tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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