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The Crossroads

Guests: Irene and Domingo Garcia
From the series: Rich in Love (Day 1 of 3)
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Bob: Domingo Garcia was 15 years old when his girlfriend became pregnant. The two of them decided to marry, and Domingo and Irene Garcia’s marriage did not start off in a healthy place.

Domingo: I drank to the point that everybody around me was associated with drinking. Every occasion was an occasion for a party and to get drunk. That’s what that turned into—a lot of people coming in that I didn’t know—men that were foul. They were just very negative and had cruel things to say. I knew that it would be a bad place for Irene to be, and she was a 16-year-old girl. These guys would just get drunk and foul.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, July 5th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. The statistics show that Domingo and Irene Garcia’s marriage should not have lasted, but the Garcias know the God who transcends statistics. We’ll hear their story today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Wednesday edition. I don’t think I’ve ever heard you and Barbara described as messy people.

Dennis: Well, have you been to our house and had a surprise visit? [Laughter] That’s only because we know how to prepare our house when we invite guests. Isn’t that what we all do?

Bob: There is that room that I’ve seen you put stuff in when you have a guest coming over. [Laughter]

Dennis: Ohhh! Yes; you should see my hunting closet. It’s—

Bob: But that’s not the kind of messy people were talking about.

Dennis: No; it’s not. We’re talking about how—well, just how life spins out people that—well, they need a lot of love.

Bob: And we may not be described as messy people, but the truth is all of us are; aren’t we?
Dennis: We are messy people, and the subtitle of the book we’re going to talk about today is *When God Rescues Messy People*. The name of the book is *Rich in Love*. Irene Garcia wrote it. She is here, along with her husband Domingo. Welcome to *FamilyLife Today*.

Irene: Thank you for having us.

Domingo: Thank you so much.

Dennis: Domingo and Irene live in California. They have been married since 1968. They have been foster care parents—or had children of their own for—count it—32 children. Now, is that the accurate number now, or has it gone up?

Irene: No; it’s 32 still.

Dennis: It’s still 32. Well, with folks like you—

Bob: We’ll check before the time the program’s over—

Dennis: Exactly.

Bob: —to see if it has changed.

Dennis: You guys have quite a story. In fact, your story really begins with the homes that you come from. They couldn’t be more different. What three words would you use, Irene, to describe the home you grew up in? Domingo, it’s coming to you next—same question.

Domingo: Okay.

Irene: I would say, “Mexican, happy, and musical.”

Dennis: Wow! Okay.

Bob: It was a fun environment.

Irene: It was a *great* environment. It was a real typical Mexican—jovial—just full of love and laughter. I mean, I had a happy childhood. I loved my life! I think back on my life, and I just—what memories. I *loved* my life.

Dennis: Okay. How about you, Domingo?

Domingo: I would have to say, “Cold, hungry, and afraid.”

Dennis: Wow! Unpack that a bit.
Domingo: Well, with ten of us kids, there just wasn’t enough of anything to go around—whether it was warmth, or food, or love. There wasn’t any of that. My dad was pretty physical, and he had a temper. You had a tendency to be cautious about everything you did, wondering if it was right or wrong—not knowing because you weren’t taught what right or wrong was / not knowing whether you were crossing a line or not.

Dennis: So, you grew up in an abusive home?

Domingo: Yes, sir.

Dennis: Were you ever hit?

Domingo: Yes, sir.

Dennis: Did you ever vow, when you grew up and became a husband and a daddy, that you would never do that to your kids?

Domingo: No; I don’t think I did. I didn’t think that far. I was pretty young—I was pretty young. I think my dad left when I was about seven—best of my memory. That came later in life but not at that point—no.

Bob: You met Irene when the two of you were in junior high; right?

Domingo: Yes, sir. We were 13 years old.

Bob: And were you instantly attracted to her?

Domingo: No; I have to say not. I was more of a wild party kind of guy and more running around with the guys than I was so much with the girls—but no; not instantly.

Bob: Did you notice him, Irene?

Irene: Immediately. I went to the water faucet to take a drink. I looked up and I saw this cute boy. I thought / I said—this is the truth: “I’m going to marry that boy.” After I said that, I thought: “What?! Why did I say such a silly thing?” And I did.

Bob: Did you know anything about him? Did you know he was a troublemaker?

Irene: All I knew was that he was cute, and he was new at our school. [Laughter] And he was one of those guys that—everything my dad would not want me to be involved in. I remember seeing him—and he was 13, and we were in junior high, and he was smoking on campus. Back then—you know how far we go back—that was like a no-no. I mean, you would—you’d be suspended for wearing strapless shoes, you know? It was very different back then.
But I saw him—and I don’t know—I remember just thinking, “I’m going to marry him.” Then, I thought, “That was just a dumb thing to say”; but obviously, God was working all the way back then.

**Dennis:** What did your dad think about him?

**Irene:** My dad didn’t want me to have anything to do with him. First, my dad said we could start seeing each other at 15. Then, when I turned 15, my dad said, “Absolutely not.” Then, we started sneaking around. One day, my dad came home and found him. We were—he would sneak in through my window. So, one day, my dad came home, and we’d fallen asleep—we were just lying on the bed—but my dad opened my bedroom door, and there we were.

**Dennis:** He called the police.

**Irene:** He did call the police. He called the police—

**Dennis:** And as a result, found out some things about—

**Irene:** Lots of things. I found out some things too. At that time, I think he was 15. The police were reading his record—and it just kept going, and going, and going. At that point, things weren’t as good as they were in the beginning—you know—infatuation. I was—didn’t know what to do. I was kind of lost, at that point; but at that time, my father and I didn’t talk because so much had happened between Domingo, and me, and my father.

That particular night, my father walked in—and I’ll never forget—my father held his cool. He didn’t get mad. He just called the police. Domingo sat there, with his head down, and we heard his record. Then, the police took him. My father went to his room—didn’t say anything to me except: “You know what? I’m going to lock you up if that’s what I have to do to keep you in the house.” So, that was it. That was the beginning of his relationship with Domingo.

**Bob:** Domingo, what was on your rap sheet that was read that night?

**Domingo:** Just a lot of—I don’t know—theft and—I don’t know—everything from breaking curfew to vandalism to drinking in public—all kinds of different things. I think I had even stolen a car—different things of that nature.

**Bob:** You’re 15. You don’t even have a driver’s license, and you’re stealing cars?

**Domingo:** Well, I was caught driving a car without a license. So, they labeled it as being stolen.
**Bob:** Were these just survival skills for you? What was going on?

**Domingo:** I have to say that I grew up pretty much a good boy—I was mischievous. I got in trouble, like any other child, but I wasn’t wicked. I didn’t want to go out and destroy the world or anything and start fires or whatever. It was just that—

I remember coming to a point, at nine or ten years old, where I realized that things were different for me than other kids. You know—they had dads / they had moms—they had all these things that were—they would go to Disneyland, and go camping, and do all these things. We did nothing—absolutely nothing. I said, “Well, this isn’t fair.”

I grew up in a Baptist church. So, I knew of God and what He stood for. I just kind of came to the conclusion that: “If there is a God, then He’s not fair, and I want nothing to do with Him.” At that point, I started to get in trouble. I was about ten years old. That’s when I started doing anything to get out of going to church, and jumping out the window and running away, and doing different stuff—just getting involved with the bad element and doing what I wanted to do, which was all the wrong way.

**Bob:** Irene, when the police took Domingo away, back when you were 15 years old—and you just heard his rap sheet read to you and your dad said, “I’ll lock you up if that’s what I have to do”—shouldn’t that have been the end of the story?

**Irene:** It should have been. It wasn’t. There was a series of things that had happened. Domingo and I were already involved, sexually, at that point. Afterwards, I was starting to get fearful. I knew what I was doing was wrong. I felt very broken-hearted that I was hurting my father, because my father’s always been my hero. I loved my father.

I don’t know why I was attracted to Domingo and why I did the things—I cut school. I started doing all these bad things that I shouldn’t have done, but I can’t explain why. I do know, at that point—a few months later—I realized that my father was right, and I needed to start making some changes. Then, that’s when I eventually broke up with Domingo and just said, “This is not good.” We were actually broken up. At the time I found out I was pregnant, we were not together.

**Dennis:** How did you find out you were pregnant?

**Irene:** Well, I went to a friend’s house. Her older sister—we were there talking. She said to me: “Look at you! You look like you’re filling out.” She goes, “Are you pregnant?!” And there was—everybody was in the room. It was like somebody took water and just threw it at me. I mean, I never even thought of that. So, I realized then—as I started getting sick every morning and I had all the symptoms of being pregnant. I realized that was a possibility. So, I had to wait until I was 16 to go to the doctor’s.

I went to the doctor’s, and he told me that I was pregnant. I didn’t want Domingo to know, because I realized that we shouldn’t have been together. I just decided that I was
going to look to find a home for unwed mothers and see what I could do. I didn’t know what I was going to do, but I knew I had to do something. I didn’t want to bring shame to my family because, during those days, when you were pregnant, they shipped you away or they sent you away to get an abortion. So, it was a very, very serious thing—especially in the Mexican culture—to be pregnant and not to be married. So, I didn’t want to bring shame on my family.

**Dennis:** How did you ultimately end up telling Domingo that you were pregnant?

**Irene:** I ended up going to tell him when I found out I was pregnant. I went to his work, and he was sitting on a chair. I remember thinking I had to tell him I was pregnant. I was just sick to my stomach, thinking that he was going to reject me or send me away; and he didn’t.

He was a 16-year-old boy, and he sat in his chair. I remember telling him I was pregnant. He looked up in the sky, and he was thinking. I remember thinking, “Oh, my gosh—he’s going to let me have it.” He looked at me and he said, “Well, Irene, we’ll just have to get married. I’ll take care of you and the baby.” I just remember thinking, “You’re only 16!” but he kept his word.

**Dennis:** What was going on, Domingo?

**Domingo:** Well, Irene was the only friend I ever really had. It wasn’t—when you asked me earlier about the physical attraction with Irene, it wasn’t that so much as she listened—she asked me questions—she wanted to know about me. That had never happened before.

So, we’d built this relationship—this real relationship. To her, it was probably one of many. To me, it was the one and only. So, I pursued that—I wanted that. I also knew that I had a responsibility, and I wanted to take that—take care of that. Like I said before, I wasn’t evil. I didn’t want to burn down the world. I knew right from wrong; I wanted to do what was right. I felt it was my responsibility, at that point, to get married and raise this child—had to fight for that. It was a battle to even get married, at that time.

**Bob:** How did your dad find out that you were pregnant?

**Irene:** I told him. One night, I waited for him to come home from work; because he would come home about two in the morning. He walked in the door. I said, “Daddy, I have something to tell you.” When I told him, he, once again, didn’t say a word. He just looked at me and walked into his room. I said, “Dad, Domingo wants to talk to you.” He said: “I don’t want to talk to him. Get him out of the house.” I knew it was not a good idea.

So, I went to bed that night. Then, the next day, Domingo knocked at the door and said,
“I’m talking to your dad.” He went and he pounded on his bedroom door. My father let him in, and Domingo can explain to you what happened after that.

Domingo: I just—I just told him that I wanted to get married—that this is something that I was responsible for and we wanted to do. I just kind of read off criteria—where I wasn’t—although I had a big rap sheet, I wasn’t your normal 15-year-old. I had been on my own since I was 12. I had a full-time job. I had a car / I had insurance. I had a place to live. I had everything set-up—so I was ready to take that responsibility on, and that I was responsible, and that if he would consent to us getting married.

Bob: And he said, “Yes”?

Domingo: No; he didn’t answer me at that point. He just said—he was very quiet—didn’t say much of anything—didn’t—he really didn’t ask me anything. He just let me speak. Then, he said, “I’ll have Irene call you and get back with you,” or something along those lines.

Dennis: So, you got married.

Irene: We did.

Dennis: He finally gave consent.

Irene: He did.

Dennis: It wasn’t long after you were married that you saw another dark side of Domingo.

Irene: I did. I started to see that there was a dark side, but I didn’t really know how bad it really was. It was the second day after we were married. They were planning this reception for us with Domingo’s family. All of a sudden—you know, it was kind of a happy time—people came into the house that weren’t family. 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 followed him and I thought, “What’s wrong?” I thought, “What happened?”

He looked at me—he said: “Irene, 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.” The way I was brought up—I mean, that would be very rude to do to his family. So, my only thought was: “Why? What do you mean I can’t go out? This is a reception for us! I’m going to go out.” I started to argue with him. I was very belligerent, strong-willed, and mouthy.

He said, “No; you’re not.” And then, the next thing I remember is just his fist across my face. He said, “You’re staying in here.” I was afraid—I mean, I was fearful. It kind of took the air out of me. I didn’t know how to respond, 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, but I felt like nothing. Here I was—my husband walked out—and I thought, “I’m letting fear dictate who I am.” But I was fearful. I stayed in the room that night; and then, the reception went on. I thought this was my penance for having sex with my husband outside of marriage. I thought that this is what I had to go through so God would forgive me.

**Bob:** Domingo, what was going on that night?

**Domingo:** I vaguely remember that night, and that’s not a cop-out. I take responsibility for everything I’ve done; but obviously, when you drink, you don’t remember a lot. There was that time, and times after that, where I would black out. By that, I mean you don’t remember things. The last thing you remembered was something in the afternoon, and you woke up the next morning—type thing.

**Bob:** To hit her, though, as you hit her—that was the pattern you had experienced as a child. You were just doing what had been modeled for you.

**Domingo:** Yes; I believe so. You, statistically, could read all about that; but I don’t want that to be a cop-out. I still did that. I should take responsibility for that.

I think that’s exactly why we do what we do with kids today because—for Irene and I, married that young—nobody told us—nobody sat down and took the time to tell us what marriage should be like, what raising a child should be like, what any of those things—you know, there was no training—not even a mom and dad coming alongside and telling us certain things—we get to figure it out.

So, it was tough. Like I said, you will normally repeat the things that you see in your childhood. You just emulate those things. We tell that to parents, all the time, nowadays: “You’re teaching your kids, whether you know it or not / whether you intend to or not. Everything—every action you do / every word you say—it’s going to have an effect on those kids.”

**Dennis:** Irene was pregnant. There was another incident that happened, not long after that?

**Irene:** Yes. Domingo was going out, and he would go out with a friend of his—they’d go out, and they’d go drinking. This particular day—he was getting dressed. I asked him where he was going. He just said, “I’m going out.” You know, I started badgering. I’d say: “Why are you going? Why can’t you stay here with me?” Somehow, when he came out of the bathroom, I grabbed his arm. I just—you know, I was pregnant—I felt ugly, and young, and alone. I just felt like he couldn’t stand to be around me. So, when I grabbed his arm, he knocked me down. When he came out of the bathroom, I was lying on the floor and he kicked my stomach.
We’ve talked about this. One day, when Domingo and I were talking about it—he looked at me and he said, “I don’t even remember doing that, Irene.” I feel bad to talk about these things, but the reason we have talked about sharing these things is because there’s hope. There is always hope.

If you would have told me *that* when I was lying on the floor—feeling like no one loved me and worthless—if you would have told me, then, there was hope, I would have never believed it. But God allowed me to go through all of this—and Domingo—so that we could see the hope that there is in Christ. You know, it was a bad day / it was a bad experience; but you know what? Now, here we are talking about it. I’m married to an amazing man. So, there is hope.

**Bob:** You know, we talked about statistics—statistically—the two of you getting married young, already pregnant, nobody giving you any premarital counsel—that shouldn’t have lasted a year.

**Irene:** I know.

**Bob:** You should have either been a single-parent mom, raising that one child, or maybe had the baby—but, at some point, the two of you should have just said, “Forget it.”

**Domingo:** Actually, it shouldn’t have even taken place. We had to get consent from our parents, a priest, and a judge in order to get married at that age. It was quite a hurdle. The priest told us to give the child up and different things that we still—we had to fight for that.

I didn’t realize it then—and still kind of funny now—but we’ve talked to people who said: “God was working, back then, because anybody else would have just walked away or just said, ‘Well, there’s my excuse.’” Everybody I knew and worked with said, “Hey, it’s not your problem. Just go your way. Walk your way. Walk away.” And I said, “No. No; it is.”

You know—I know I never had any intention of hurting my child or Irene. So, some of those things I don’t even remember. Here again, I’m not excusing it; but I don't remember those things. Somehow, God was working, back then, because we had to work through a lot of issues, just to get this—and then sitting in court all day, at the age of 16, with our parents—with my mom and Irene’s dad—to get consent to get married. That was a big one there.

**Bob:** I know you guys have talked to a lot of young couples who are in circumstances similar to the circumstances you were in when you first got married. You have to focus on a wife being safe—protection being in place. You have to be able to address the issues of abuse—the alcohol—all that was going on with you guys. I mean, you can’t just ignore that stuff. But because of what you’ve experienced, you have an opportunity to
say to couples: “There is a chance for you to have a completely different marriage than the one you are in right now.

**Domingo:** Yes.

**Bob:** “That doesn’t happen by getting a divorce. That happens by you becoming different people. That happens through the transforming power of God’s grace in your lives.”

In fact, we’re going to hear, this week, your story of how God did that for both of you. I want to encourage our listeners to stay with us this week and hear the entire story. If, for some reason, you’re not able to tune in each day on your local station, download the FamilyLife app. That way, you have instant access to each day’s program wherever you are. At your convenience, you can listen to the app on your smart phone or your device. Or you can log on at FamilyLifeToday.com and stream or download the programs that are available on our website. And you can sign up to have FamilyLife Today delivered as a podcast as well.

But this is one of those stories that you’re going to want to stay tuned for this week. I’d also encourage you to get a copy of the book that tells Irene and Domingo’s story. It’s called *Rich in Love*. It’s a book that we’ve got in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can order it from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call to order at 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, the website—FamilyLifeToday.com—or call 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, you hear a story like the one we’ve heard today and it’s a great reminder of the fact that every couple heads into marriage with a little bit of naivety. No matter what your situation / no matter how young or old you are, there are some things we’re all a little naïve about before we are joined together as husband and wife.

When we started the FamilyLife *Weekend to Remember*® marriage getaways, back in 1976, these events were initially designed for engaged couples. In fact, it was only years later that married couples started saying: “Hey, wait! We can benefit from this information even though we’ve been married for five, or ten, or fifteen, or twenty years.”

And I just want to remind our listeners—if you’ve never joined us at a *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaway, this fall, we will be hosting three or four dozen getaways across the country. There’s an opportunity for you, today, to go online and find out when a getaway is happening in a city near you. Start making plans to do some marriage maintenance for the two of you—get away for a fun, romantic weekend—and focus on each other / focus on your relationship for a whole weekend. You can find out more about the *Weekend to Remember* on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com.

And one thing we’re hoping to do this fall is—we would like to continue being able to scholarship pastors and their wives to the *Weekend to Remember* marriage getaway.
We’ve got a scholarship fund that we’ve established that we’re raising funds for right now. You just need to know—when you support the ministry of FamilyLife Today, you’re helping us provide practical biblical help for marriages and families. If you’re a regular listener, and you’ve never donated, today’s a good day to do that. You can donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate. Or you can mail your donation to FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to hear about the early years of Irene and Domingo Garcia’s marriage. We’ll hear about some of the controlling behavior that was going on and about the challenges that this couple faced as they started life together. That’s coming up tomorrow. I hope you can join us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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