

“I had to act different parts and play different roles all my life, and I was just plain tired of it!”

-- Rick Rodriguez, in a letter to Gabe, November 26, 2000.

Introduction

In late 2000, Ricky Rodriguez (*aka* Davidito, Pete, David in The Family) was close to making a formal decision to leave the group. He had already left his mother’s highly secretive Family leadership compound in Portugal, along with his longtime girlfriend and future wife Elixia, (*aka* Nicole).

At this time he wrote a long letter to Michael Brown (*aka* Gabe, Terry Lee Martin, Jeremy Woods in The Family). Gabe was an older Family Member who had lived and worked closely with David Berg and Karen Zerby (*aka* Maria, Mama, Mom, Katherine R. Smith in The Family) since 1981, acting as one of their personal assistants. He had also helped supervise or “shepherd” other members of Berg and Zerby’s staff.

Rick had been friends with Gabe while growing up. He wrote the following letter to Gabe, dated November 26 2000, in an attempt to help Gabe see some of the errors of The Family.

Dear Gabe,

Hi! It was really good to hear from you! I sent M&P [Maria and Peter. Peter, *aka* Christopher Smith, is Maria’s husband and co-leader of The Family.] a newsletter containing our activities of the past couple months, and they’ll probably pass it on to you—that is, if they got it. I tried out one of the new e-mail addresses that came out in the GV [*Grapevine* – internal Family newsletter], and I also sent it to Gallio to pass on, just to be sure it got to them.

We sent some pictures in the letter as well, taken with the digital camera that Vanz gave us before we left. That was very kind of him! We’ve used it quite a bit so far.

We don’t have any kids yet, but we hope to once we get our life settled down a bit. It’s been quite stressful for us over the last year, and we just haven’t found a place to call “home” yet. So until we do, and have a decent plan of what we want to do for the next few years at least, and until we’re able to find a steady and adequate source of income, we think it’s wise to wait.

Gabe, I’ve been doing a lot of thinking over the last year and a half, as I’m sure you know, and I see things very differently than I did previously. It’s taken me a long time to make this kind of stand and commitment in my life, but the Lord has been very patient with me and brought me along very slowly.

In the few years when I was there with Nicole at your place [Zerby’s leadership compound in Portugal], I more or less put my spiritual progress on hold because something didn’t feel right about the direction M&P were taking the Family. I learned lots about myself, and I learned lots about different kinds of women, but other than that, I

really didn't learn anything at all that helped me. I could feel that it was not the life I wanted, and even more than that, I didn't believe in much of what was being taught. But because going against what I was taught to believe all my life was an extremely daunting thought, I knew I had to be absolutely sure that it was the right thing to do and proceed with caution.

In one of the conversations we had before I left, I told you that I was a "know it all". Well, I knew that I knew nothing compared to what I ought to know, but what I meant was that I knew everything there was to know about jumping through the right hoops and playing the game correctly. I had been there and done that as far as I wanted to, and every time I was faced with the next level, that of "leadership" in any way, shape or form, I would pass. I knew full well that I was capable of being a "good leader" as far as outward appearance is concerned, in the sense of handling people, using prophecy, counseling, upholding the standard, being loving etc.

But I had to act different parts and play different roles all my life, and I was just plain tired of it! Why would I want to subject my self to all the pain and hardship and humiliation that goes with leadership unless, A: I believed that it was God's will for my life, or B: I got off on the perks and status and the perceived power that goes with such a position. Well, I know some social-climbing people who are just in it for pride's sake, but I'm not going to go into that now.

Even though many people, possibly including yourself, think I'm a very proud guy, I just never got off on the idea of bossing people around or having them look up to me because of my position.

I know I'm a proud person. I have known that for many years. But I've learned a whole lot about pride this last year, and I see that it is the sneakiest, cleverest, most resourceful enemy that we have. Just when you think you've nailed it down and know exactly how it works and what you can do to fight it, it sneaks up behind you and blinds you to the truth. After that, well, you might as well forget it, except for a miracle of God!

People like to label me as proud because it's a "logical" explanation as to why I chose not to "yield and obey" and use the "New Weapons" [Zerby taught that Family Members had unique spiritual gifts, or weapons, that enabled them to lead a victorious Christian life] among many other things. When that label was given to many other people over the years that chose to buck the tide, God knows I believed it to be true. How could they not be proud—they're going against God's will in their lives, and our pride is what prompts us to do that?

Well, here we have a classic example of a true fact used to substantiate a false assumption. The true fact is that our pride is what keeps us from doing what God wants us to do. The false assumption is that those people are in rebellion to what God wants them to do. The truth is that nobody can tell you what God's will is for your life! Only the Lord, through His Holy Spirit can tell you.

The Family has learned to bypass that Spirit of Truth, and instead rely on "leaders" and "shepherds" to tell them what God's will is. I remember you telling me that of course we need leaders and shepherds to interpret the Bible for us because the Bible can be interpreted so many different ways. Well, it's true that the Bible can be twisted and contorted to fit just about any image of God or doctrine that one wants to have and foist on others. But once you receive Jesus and are filled with His Holy Spirit, you have all the tools you need to interpret the Bible correctly, and find not only the timeless truths

of the past, but also His living word and will in your life for today! You just have to be open to receive those truths.

Remember the [Bible] verse that says, “For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Cor.8:12)? All we need is the will to understand and the desire to rightly divide the Word of Truth, and then the Holy Spirit can reveal it to us. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” The role of the Holy Spirit in our lives has been pushed aside in favor of conformity under the guise of unity, and man-pleasing disguised as “following closely”.

There is a lot of good in the Family, but the root problem is that the Family was BUILT ON THE WRONG FOUNDATION! If the foundation of your building is faulty, then what does it matter how well you build the rest of the building? Instead of being a movement solely designed to witness Salvation and help Christians become missionaries, it became a reason to look down on other Christians who weren't “doing enough for Jesus”, and some kind of elite self-improvement, mutual-admiration society in which you can win brownie points with God if you keep up the pace and work hard enough.

This “us against them” mentality that most Family members have towards the body of Christ is hard-wired very deeply in their minds. This is a basic tenet of faith for them. This is how we started! We started in hatred of the Churches and Church people for failing God because we decided we knew what they were supposed to be doing. We decided that we could disobey a direct order from Jesus himself not to judge others.

“Wait a minute! That verse doesn't apply to us! I know Jesus said ‘Judge not that ye be not judged’, but He only put that verse in the Bible so others wouldn't judge us! We have a monopoly on the truth! We have God's ear! We are above obeying basic spiritual principles like the one Grandmother taught of just lifting up Jesus instead of trying to tear others down. We are the people! We are it!”

Hmmm. Does that sound right to you? Well, of course it does, because that's basically what we've been taught since day one! But when you start questioning, and yes, DOUBTING Family beliefs, and you're desperate with the Lord to find the truth, He starts showing you some amazing things! See, contrary to what has been crammed down our throats all our lives, it is NOT bad to question and doubt! How will you ever know if something is right if you just close down your mind and force yourself to believe something just because someone told you it was true? How will you know if something is from God or a cleverly disguised lie of the Devil unless you take some time to question and doubt, and take it to the Lord to get the answers?

The foundation that the Family is built on is PRIDE, plain and simple! “Jesus, I thank you that I am not as this Church person! I am doing something for you! I have free sex! I knew my Bible well 10 years ago! I fuck you every day! I have stayed true. I have not fallen by the wayside! I run the race faithfully on the treadmill of spiritual works trips!” How pathetic it is that we have the audacity to look down on anyone!

On the other side of the coin is the “Church Christian”. I met some in California, and while I certainly can't speak for all of them, I believe the attitude of many of them is more like that of the publican, “God, be merciful to me—a sinner! I know I have failed You many times (haven't we all!). I know that I could have shown so much more of your love to those You brought into my life. Help me to not to judge my neighbor, but to love

him like the Good Samaritan. I don't have much to offer you, but please use my life for your glory."

God has delivered me from a Family life of pride and vain-glory, always striving for some sort of "breakthrough" to the next spiritual level of enlightenment. I don't know why I was so blind, that I couldn't see it for what it was! We just get our nose so close to the grindstone of good behaviors that we can't see how meaningless it is to God! We have our faces plastered so thick with spiritual cosmetics that we can't see ourselves for who we really are.

When someone is struggling or burdened, the answer we give is not one that lightens their load, or points the way to the Amazing Grace of Jesus—Hell no! That would be way too easy! We have to make ourselves acceptable in God's sight! We have to sit them down and open the trunk of spiritual makeup and go to work! "Don't worry, you'll be as good as new in a little while! Just let me touch up your loving-Jesus lipstick, which I see you've neglected to use recently—no wonder you're feeling discouraged! Oh, my! I see you haven't used the praise-time eyeliner today! No wonder you feel burdened! Remember, we just have to praise our way through to victory!

"There, all done! Don't you feel better now? Presto, chango, poof! Now not only do you have the strength to make it through another day in the hard-labor camp of spiritual performance, but you're also acceptable to Jesus now! Goodness, gracious! Did you really think that He would accept you as you were? What a ludicrous idea! You're all plain and ugly like that! You need these props so you can stay on His good side. You need to look your best for Him so that He'll pour out his blessings! You don't want to miss out on any, do you?"

You see, Gabe, we are God's wife! We are His body! We are not His bitch that he casts aside or throws on the spiritual scrap-heap whenever we don't look good enough or perform well enough, or fail to live up to some spiritual standard! He loves us just as we are and accepts us ALL for who we are.

I could write pages and pages of what I learned recently about God's Amazing Grace, but I'm going on a faith trip tonight and I have to prepare. If you're interested and you want to discuss this further, I'll tell you what I learned and you can see what you think.

Actually, the subject of pride that I've just spent 2 pages writing about is marginal compared to the importance of understanding the truth about God's love and acceptance. I would really like to share it with you, but if you'd rather not get into it, then that's your choice. Please know that my goal is not to attack you or your beliefs, even though it may seem like that's what I'm doing. Rather, I was there, caught in that same trap, and I would have given almost anything if someone had shared these things with me. So it's more of a case of "Do unto others..." than anything else.

Someone told me once, "Gabe knows the truth". Well, I don't know exactly what they meant by that, but if I knew then what I know now, we sure could have had some interesting discussions! Mama and Peter have made their choice. They have deliberately rationalized the truth away in their minds until now all they are left with is a strong delusion. It's so sad! They will pay for the many times they have caused God's little sheep to stumble and fall away from Jesus, and having to live with the burden of that knowledge in Heaven will not be very nice.

But Jesus loves them so much, just like He loves you or me or Bill Clinton, or anyone! Their sins are no greater than mine or anyone else, because to God any sin, big or small, would keep you from Heaven except for Jesus' love and sacrifice for us. He loved us and gave himself for us, and it's just so sad that so many of us Christians don't fully understand what He did for us—the amazing liberation that He came to bring! All will be forgiven in Heaven and we'll all understand then, and we'll all be united in Jesus' love.

There will be no separations, no borders, no “corners of Heaven” for the elitists; no shoe-shine boys in the basement; no little grass shacks for the oppressors of all the little Sophie-the-washerwoman-type Christians. We will all truly be one big happy Family. Jesus will wipe away all the tears that will stream down our face for all the times that we enforced the “standard” and the “rules” out of pride, instead of following His example love and acceptance.

It's not too late for you, Gabe, to make a change! Even though all will be made right in Heaven, that doesn't mean that we have to continue to botch up here on Earth. It doesn't even have to happen all at once! God is not in a hurry, believe it or not! All I'm asking of you is to consider what I've written you here, and let me explain further what God has been showing me about His grace and love through my friends, Christian books, and my recent Bible studies.

I know that you are a natural leader in the sense that people like you and look up to you. You inspire people to do what you ask. That is a very important gift! The way the Lord's gifted you to tell stories is a wonderful talent! You have the ability to make the stories interesting and come alive! People love stories! Jesus used stories in his teaching because not only did they serve to make the point in the clearest way possible, but they were fun and interesting, and something the people wouldn't forget.

You should pray about investing some time in improving your speaking skills and writing abilities. There aren't very many good speakers there, unfortunately, although there are a couple good writers you could learn a lot from, and of course, they would also have many tips on improving speech and speaking to an audience etc. I think it would be a worthwhile use of time, and one that you would be thankful for in the future.

Just remember that our goal in life should NOT be to uphold some sort of institution. It should NOT be to live up to a standard. It should NOT be to reprove the world of sin (that's the job of the HS). It should NOT be to cover problems as best you can so you can live in unity with others. It should NOT be to “win” as many souls as you can!

Our goal in life SHOULD BE to show the amazing love and acceptance of Jesus to as many people as we can! It SHOULD BE to follow God's will in our lives (which is very different for every single person). It SHOULD BE to show people how God can be a part of their lives instead of trying to conform their life to fit God's supposed plan for them.

Here's something a young person told me recently in a letter explaining why they were leaving the Family:

“we just wanted to get ‘back to the basics’ and learn all over again about how much God loves us, that He is here for us and all those important things that you forget at times when you are in an organized religion.”

Oh, my! Imagine people having to leave the Family to truly experience God's love and grace! What a sad legacy!

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

"For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with (me)." 2 Cor. 11:3.

Somebody's been preaching another Jesus! Thank God I ditched him many months ago! Somebody's been corrupting God's sheep by leading them astray from the simplicity of the love and grace of Jesus! The Gospel of grace is being re-written to be a gospel of bondage and works cleverly disguised as new weapons for the fight.

Sorry to end on such a heavy note, but I have to go. I'm praying for you, Gabe! Let me know what you think!

Take care,

Pete