

Stop. Being. Afraid.

That's what God said to Hagar...
 Sent away from her home with an thirteen year old boy...
 Wandering in the wilderness
 And when the water was gone...
 She left the starving child under a bush...
 Just left him there
 She couldn't bear to watch her child die

And God said to her...

Do not be afraid.

***Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand,
 for I will make a great nation of him.***

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water.
 She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

Ishmael. The first-born son of Abraham and Sarah's Egyptian slave.
 Became the father of a great nation... Islam.

God said... **Stop. Being. Afraid.**

Many years later... before Jesus sent his disciples on their first mission...
 He warned them about vile treatment they would face.

A ***student*** doesn't get a better desk than the ***teacher***.
 A ***worker*** doesn't make more money... than the ***boss***.
 Be ***satisfied... content... pleased*** even...
 when ***you***... my beloved students... my harvest hands...
 get the same treatment I get.
 If they call ***me***... the ***Son of God***... a ***servant*** of the ***Devil***...
 what makes ***you*** think... you won't get the same... or ***worse?***

Don't be intimidated.

Eventually... ***everything*** will be out in the open...

Everyone will know... how things ***really*** are.

Don't be bullied into silence... by the threats of thugs.

There is ***nothing*** they can do... to your soul... ***Nothing***.

What's the price of a pet canary? Some loose change, right?

God cares more about what happens to that bird...than you ***ever*** will.

And you mean so much more to God.

He pays knows everything about you...

right down to the number of hairs on your head!

Don't be intimidated by all their bullying.

You sre worth... more than ***a million*** canaries.

Stand up for ***me***... against popular opinion

and I'll stand up for ***you***... before my Father in heaven.

If you turn tail and run... do you really think I'll cover for you?

Don't think I've come to make your lives cozy.

I've come to cut... father from son...

daughter from mother... bride from mother-in-law...

cut through these cozy domestic arrangements...

and ***free you***... for God.

Well-meaning family members can be your ***worst*** enemies.

If you prefer father or mother over me... ***you don't deserve me.***

If you prefer son or daughter over me... ***you don't deserve me.***

If you don't go... all the way... with me... through thick and thin

you don't deserve me.

If your first concern is taking care of yourself...
 you'll *never* find yourself.
 But if you *forget* about yourself... and *look to me*...
 you'll find both *yourself*... and *me*.

Stop. Being. Afraid.

John Chrysostom... patriarch of Constantinople in the fourth century...
 was arrested and charged with being a Christian...

The Roman emperor threatened...

Renounce Christ... or be banished from the kingdom.
You can't banish me from the kingdom...
because the whole world is my Father's kingdom.

Then... I will take away your life.
You cannot... for my life is hid with Christ in God.

I'll take your treasure!
You cannot... for my treasure is in heaven where my heart is.

Then I will drive you away from here and you shall have no friend left.
You cannot... for I have one Friend who will never leave me.
I defy you for you can do me no harm."

You may *never* be confronted as Chrysostom was
 You are... however... challenged to renounce the faith...
 ignore commitments... compromise loyalties.
 You will be tempted to deny you ever heard of Jesus.

Come on, everyone else is!
It will be fun, and no one will ever know.

Every day... We're forced to choose
between the easy way... the quick fix... the promise of glamour...
and the way of God.

If you choose to acknowledge God the Father...
Please... don't do it with *just* with your lips...
Please... give God... *your hearts and minds.*

I pray that you know...and accept...
The Father's power and love and mercy... for *you.*

I pray that *you* will follow...
the most powerful... the most effective... the most holy...
Lord God Almighty...

On this Father's Day, as we remember our own fathers
Remember to give thanks to our Heavenly Father
The one who created us... Loves us... and will never leave us.

Remember to worship the perfect Father we all share...
And
Stop Being Afraid

Amen.