

## **Acts 15.22-31**

Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, men who were leaders among the believers. With them they sent the following letter: **The apostles and elders, your brothers. To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. We have heard that some went out from us without our authorisation and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul – men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.** So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.

### **Letters, Cards, Messages, Emails, Snapchats**

Have you ever received an amazing message from a letter or a card, an email or messaging? It could have been something really short like someone saying they love you. Or it may be a special birthday where someone has written you a long message in a birthday card.

There is a TV programme called 'World's Strictest Parents' where a British teenager is taken to live with a strict but loving family in say America. Often the hope is that the teenager will come back home having changed and be less difficult or less unhappy when they come back, having learned new ways of seeing and doing things. Many times the family they stay with shows them a strong love that combines a real love with real boundaries and this helps the teenager. But other times there is one moment that makes the teenager cry and realise what they have done to their family back home...

That moment is when they get a letter from say their mum who they live with back in Britain. I have watched a few of these programmes and as the teenager reads the letter and understands the kind of pain they have caused their mum and yet how much their mum really loves them, they cry. They cry because of the love and thinking of what they have done. Often this is the moment the teenager determines to change. That is the power of a letter.

## **Clip - World's Strictest Parents**

Direct Link - <https://youtu.be/k3jbyNTzNZg> (forward to around 30:00).  
Link accessed April 2019.

## **The Bible and The Boat**

The amazing thing about the Bible is that it is from God to you, to me and to all people. The Bible shows how much God loves us, cares about us and wants the best for us. His plans are always the best for us because he created us (see Psalm 139).

Imagine you made an amazing model of a boat which you worked on for a year in your spare time. You worked to get all the parts and sent up for bits from America. You hand built all the parts really carefully to put this together and you wrote down detailed instructions of how someone else could build it, the process you went through to get all the parts and how much time and effort you put into building it. You would take care of that boat and you would care about the boat. If someone else

Your love for the boat you've carefully built at great cost to yourself is a bit like how God cares for us. And if we wanted to know about how much you cared about that boat, we could read the instructions or look at the boat. And that's a bit like what the Bible does, telling us of God's love for us.

## **A Note Home**

In July 2014, a teacher from Barrowford Primary School in Lancashire, England wrote a letter home to pupils after they had taken their tests. ([Linky to BBC site here](#))

In her letter she wrote that the students were more than just a set of test results. You see, we should aim to do well in education as our future can depend on how well we do. But life is about more than just test results. Many successful people didn't do that well at school. But there is more - things like goodness, faithfulness, respect, getting on with others, communicating well, loving people. These are just as valuable!

Here's a photo that a parent from the school posted from Twitter of the actual letter with the text written out from what the letter says:

Dear Charlie Owen,

Please find enclosed your end of KS2 test results. We are very proud of you as you demonstrated huge amounts of commitment and tried your very best during this tricky week.

However, we are concerned that these tests do not always assess all of what it is that make each of you special and unique. The people who create these tests and score them do not know each of you-- the way your teachers do, the way I hope to, and certainly not the way your families do. They do not know that many of you speak two languages. They do not know that you can play a musical instrument or that you can dance or paint a picture. They do not know that your friends count on you to be there for them or that your laughter can brighten the dreariest day. They do not know that you write poetry or songs, play or participate in sports, wonder about the future, or that sometimes you take care of your little brother or sister after school. They do not know that you have travelled to a really neat place or that you know how to tell a great story or that you really love spending time with special family members and friends. They do not know that you can be trustworthy, kind or thoughtful, and that you try, every day, to be your very best... the scores you get will tell you something, but they will not tell you everything.

So enjoy your results and be very proud of these but remember there are many ways of being smart.

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## **The Apostle's Letter**

In Acts 15 in the Bible, the Apostles (the guys in charge of the early church) had a big decision to make. The church was still quite young and although they knew about the faith often more than we do (!) they weren't sure about certain things. It's the same today. In every generation, new things happen and new questions come up about how we relate the Bible to what's going on around us. Things around technology and life & death for example. There are always new things happening and new challenges for us.

The same was true for the Apostles who had to decide whether or not people needed to be 'circumcised' or not. Today it's obvious to us that we don't need to be (it could be a painful thing for the boys if we did need to be circumcised! Ouch!) But it was a new decision that had to be made by the Apostles and they decided (guided by the Holy Spirit) that people didn't need to be circumcised (phew!)

So what they did is to send an official letter around the churches to let them know of their decision. This letter was written, sent out by messengers (they didn't have satellite or the internet!) and then read out in churches. The same kind of thing happens today about other things (for example women bishops in the Church of England).

The Bible says that the church in Antioch got together, read the letter and were encouraged by its message. They had clearly had some rule-mad people come along who had insisted on them following a whole bunch of rules. But the Apostles got together and said 'no we don't need loads of rules. We have the teaching of Jesus which the church in Antioch knows, plus this may help them to work it out simply:

You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

Short. Simple. Clear. And a great encouragement to the people. This is also the kind of thing we should think about - how does what we believe impact what we do? Secondly, it's a good pattern to follow - writing to people in whatever way (or speaking to them) to encourage them. I recently wrote an email to my church leaders just to encourage them. So let's do three exercises to do something practical...

## **First - A Letter From God To You**

Let's imagine God was writing a letter to you (a bit like the head teacher wrote to her students). What kinds of things would it say? Use the bit of paper (download from the link below) and write / think / have someone else write down what you think God would say in a letter to you that is encouraging.



[An example letter from God](#)



[A blank one for you to fill in](#)

## **Second - A Letter From You To Others To Encourage Them**



[A blank letter for you to write to someone else to encourage them](#)

## **Third - How Does Your Faith Impact The Things You Do?**



[Ways Your Faith Impacts You Actions](#)