

## **TAKE HOLD OF LIFE**

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FAITH is one of the most misunderstood words we have. It is surprising how many people think that "faith" means believing just anything we are told. Such people couldn't be more wrong, in fact they are so wide of the mark that we have a different word for that sort of belief, we call it "credulity". So that if I tell you that grass is pink and you believe me, this would not be faith, it would be credulity. Faith is very different -- it is always linked with facts.

You may be surprised to find that faith is used a great deal in our everyday lives. When we go to a doctor and he gives us some medicine to make us better, we have faith in him -- provided, of course, that we do take the medicine! It would be silly to say that we had faith that the medicine would make us better and then not take it, and it is certain that the Bible would not use the word "faith" about such a person. Faith is not just believing something; it is putting your trust in that something (or that someone) and then acting on it. Faith, then, is trust followed by action.

Let me give you an example of faith. Some years ago I borrowed a 400,000-volt electric generator to show to a class of boys who were studying physics. I looked at the instruction book to find out how to operate the machine and then, standing well back, I switched on. At first there was a hissing and a crackling, and then a large blue spark flashed across between the two polished aluminium spheres with a noise like a whiplash. As it did so the electric influences for a moment caused my hair to stand on end.

As you can guess, I kept at a very respectful distance! I turned again to the instruction book to read more of what experiments I could show to the class with this device, and imagine my surprise -- and horror -- when I read that since the current supplied by the machine was so small a shock could safely be taken from it. It was half a million volts and yet I could touch it! (Incidentally don't you go touching your electric supply, for even a household wire can give you a fatal shock!) In this case, however, there it was in black and white. It could safely be touched -- or so it

said! Now it is all very well to read about it being safe and to say, "Yes, I believe that the person who wrote that book of instructions knew what he was talking about", but it is a very different thing to have such a generator producing six-inch sparks with a noise like a whiplash, making your hair stand on end, and then touch it. I knew very well that when I showed the machine to the class on the following day someone would say "Go on, sir, touch it!" because I know that boys are like that.

Finally, after plucking up my courage, I stretched my hand out towards the shining aluminium sphere, but as there was a nasty hissing noise before I got anywhere near it, I quickly withdrew my hand. Eventually, however, with my heart in my mouth, I took the plunge. There was a loud crack, a blue spark, but nothing more, and I am still alive to tell the tale.

Now before I did this if anybody had asked me if I believed what the instruction book said about it being safe to touch the machine I would have said "Yes", but that certainly wasn't real faith -- not in the way that the Bible speaks of it. Only when I had acted on what I believed, put my trust in the advice given and stretched out my hand, could I really have been said to have exercised faith. This is the sort of faith that the Bible is speaking of when it says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). It means trust Him, put your confidence in Him, and then act! There is a sense in which the Bible is God's instruction book to us, and by it He calls us to stretch out our hands in faith, not to touch a high-voltage generator but to link up with the crucified and risen Saviour.

I remember as a small boy being impressed by these words with which King George VI closed one of his Christmas broadcasts: "I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he replied: 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way'".

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