

HANS PETER ROYER

**ONLY IF YOU LET GO
YOU CAN BE HELD**

CHRIST-CENTRED

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Original German Book by Hans Peter Royer (2003) **Nur wer loslässt, wird gehalten:** Christuszentrierte Erlebnispädagogik

Translated by Lisa White

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What is the Tauernhof?

The Tauernhof is a center for conferences and camps for the Missionary Fellowship of Torchbearers. It is situated in the spectacular mountainous area of the Dachstein and Tauern within the well-known winter sports resort of Schladming. As well as ski camps and hiking camps in winter and summer we also run bible school courses.

The Tauernhof was founded in 1964 by Austrian Gernot Kunzelmann. After his fatal accident in 1988 the author of this book took over direction of the center in 1991.

There have been experiential educational programmes, especially suited to young adults, on offer at the Tauernhof since the middle of the 70s. Their aim is to promote the participants' spiritual growth in Christ by challenging the participants holistically, that is physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The Tauernhof is part of the international Missionary Fellowship of Torchbearers, an interdenominational Christian organization. It was founded in 1947 in England and comprises of 22 centers throughout the world. The Missionary Fellowship of Torchbearers is a non-profit registered association in Austria.

The aim of the Torchbearers is to make known the life of Jesus to young people. They learn to prove themselves and actively take part in the life of family, work, school and church as Christians.

More information is available at: www.torchbearers.org and www.tauernhofaustria.at

Many thanks to Lisa White for the hard work translating the originally in German written book by Hans Peter Royer.

An informative website of **Hans Peter Royer** is available under www.hanspeterroyer.at

Preface

“You have an interesting technique to preach the gospel”, I was once told by a participant of one of our skiing camps. “You don’t just talk about Jesus in the pulpit, you talk about him on the slope.” Talking about God while skiing was a “technique” to him.

A different participant incidentally, also at the skiing lift, remarked: “With you, faith seems so alive; so American”. This participant assumed it is only the Americans that talk about Jesus in their everyday life.

Now, thanks be to God, real and living Christianity is neither a “technique” nor is it something only Americans can have; Christianity is rather a life lived with God, twenty-four hours a day, sixty minutes an hour.

This book is meant primarily for those people that have made a start with God, but in the meantime have become frustrated or bored with faith. The gap between everyday life and being a Christian has become so unbelievably large that what you believe does not impact on how you live.

My heart goes out to that reader because I was stuck in that same dilemma for years, but since then have had the privilege of experiencing how exciting a life with God can be.

It should also be a workbook for all Christians that work in some capacity in education, whether as leaders of a youth group, scout troop or in educating adults.

My aim is to lay down some basics for the practical understanding and effective conveying of the gospel through this Christ-centred experiential education.

The only truth we really know comprises what we practice.

Thanks

My thanks go to Hannelore, my dearest, for her patience when I had to sit in my office for hours once again to formulate my thoughts. I especially appreciated the little attentive details like coffee or tea in between.

1 What do I mean by Christ-centred experiential education?

In its simplest form, it means to convey certain values and knowledge not just verbally in a rectangular classroom but in a holistic approach.

Our Creator God did not just give us ears and intellect but also eyes, a sense of smell, taste and touch.

Scientists talk of a right side of the brain that is responsible for emotional thinking and a left side of the brain that does the logical, abstract and analytical thinking (hemispheres). One side can only ever take in part of the surrounding reality.

But God wants to draw close to us in every area and wants to be “experienced” by us. This is why Jesus implemented the breaking of bread, so that we can “taste” how good the Lord is. That is why we have baptisms, so we can “feel” how the old self dies to make way for a new self to be resurrected.

Holistic evangelizing is based on this knowledge that God wants to be in our everything.

Through it, you learn not just to hear but to understand, not just to see, but to notice (in short to experience) yourself, your neighbor and above all God.

In particular in Scandinavian countries, in North America and England so called community colleges have long been established where practical life is taught especially through outdoor activities (canoeing, ski trips, bivvying) and the experience of communal living. The founders of these schools were largely confessing Christians with a vision to prepare young people for a practical life with God.

This tendency of going “back to nature” can also be seen more in the German-speaking part of the world in recent years.

This is the reason why adventure camps and Outward bound schools are experiencing high demands at the moment. People are tired of only ever understanding everything; they want to “experience life”.

Now, as Christians we don't have to, and shouldn't, run after every new idea, so that we are on trend. Therefore, we should, just as in everything else, check in the Holy Scriptures whether something is right or not. “What does the bible say about experiential education?”

Experiential education means to pass on knowledge, understanding or values not just verbally from the front but through games, activities and group experiences. The person you are passing this knowledge to, the “pupil” doesn't receive abstract knowledge. He rather experiences, lives through what has been taught.

Jesus Christ is a big testimony for that. He shows through his way of living and teaching that experiential education is not a new-age concept but was practised 2000 years ago.

The big dilemma in Christianity these days, as I see it, is that we want to separate our “spiritual life” from our “normal life”.

We differentiate between spiritual activities like praying, preaching, bible workshops and normal, everyday life activities, e.g. work, sports, hobbies. This inevitably leads to an abstract, almost schizophrenic way of being a Christian. I try to be nice and friendly on a Sunday in church, because

this is my spiritual life but on Monday at my place of work I laugh if someone gossips or badmouths someone else. Because now I am in my normal life.

Many churches and other organisations have been offering holiday camps where they do bible studies and sports with youths. I myself have been very blessed and enriched as a young participant in such camps. But most of the time they do not help to bridge the gap between spiritual and normal life and to get them both to work harmoniously together. During the day you do sports and have fun together. This is normal life where things are fun and free. In the mornings and evenings there is a devotion, the spiritual life where you have to be serious and contemplative.

This separation of normal and spiritual life is wrong!

If I learn to live with God, no matter whether I preach, ski, go shopping or pray I will become a trustworthy testimony of someone that combines spiritual and normal life. It does not matter whether I am a bus driver, a missionary, a secretary, a mountain guide or a preacher. In any case I need to learn to live in a relationship with God that should reflect my conscious, constant dependency on him.

Experiential education can help to show up the existing gap between a normal and a religious life. Experiential education can help people to recognise their own personal reasons for that gap and wants to support individual growth into a holistic, complete life as a Christian.

At the Tauernhof we use and understand our activity programme not as a technique to make participants receptive for the gospel. Through the activities the participants should rather experience the condition of their personal faith in their own bodies. Besides, the programme has been designed specifically so that spiritual truths of the gospel can be taught through the activities and are comprehensible on a personal level.

In Christian circles this way of passing on knowledge is still fairly new to us.

It is interesting though that Jesus was familiar with this way of preaching. Actually, he often combined teaching with experience. He did not say "Right, we'll go across this lake in a boat (worldly) and when we get to the other side we'll preach again (spiritual)". Jesus used the experience of the boat ride (Mark 4.35-41) to tell his disciples about his father. Here he taught them two things practically, namely, to expect God's almightiness in everyday life, and to trust in the personal living God. Jesus could have just stopped the storm, gone back to sleep and tell the disciples all about trust and faith at home. But Jesus did not do that. He used the situation in the boat because the disciples could experience in that moment directly what Jesus wanted to pass on to them about faith and the Almighty God. This is original exemplary Christ-centred experiential education.

We have to get back to this sort of holistic preaching again.

Christ-centred experiential education ties together life and teaching about faith. Through extreme situations that you will never forget the most important message in the world, the gospel, can be preached, conveyed and lived.

Because just as the disciples will have never forgotten the storm on the lake they also will have never forgotten the message that was attached to that experience.

This is the special and particular way in which Christ-centred experiential education "works": it ties in with the personal and existing experiences of the person and leads into the presence of the living God.

This isn't to say that verbal and frontal preaching of the gospel is wrong, but it is important that it is not the only biblical way we preach it.

Naturally, there are proven principals and methods that can be learnt within Christ-centred experiential education (that's partly what the next chapters are about) but primarily I see it as an attitude towards God and others. Christ-centred experiential education also isn't restricted to certain activities (ski trips, climbing, caving, etc) but rather everything that has anything to do with experience. This could be active or passive, physical or mental experience.

The way you use Christ-centred experiential education especially in holiday camps and training courses depends on many factors, e.g. the environment in which you live (mountains, plains, cities), your qualifications (mountain leader, sailing instructor), your God-given gifts and your personality.

One important component of Christ-centred experiential education is spontaneity. You should always be ready to take a situation and use it to pass on a message. One good example of that is the reaction Jesus had when the little children were brought to him (Matthew 19,13-15). The disciples tried to get rid of the children but Jesus lets them come to him, he blesses them and with that sends a very clear message. Jesus uses this potential conflict situation to show vividly that any human, especially the little ones and the weak ones, have free access to God. He leaves no doubt in the mind of those surrounding him that you need to have the same childlike trusting attitude to be able to meet with God.

"Experience" also means creativity, like word games, poems, stories, paradox, logic and illogic. God uses proverbs, poetry and word puns effectively in his word. I'm thinking of a proverb that used to hang above the front door of my Godparent's house and that has stuck in my mind ever since I was able to read.

This house is mine and yet it isn't

It also won't be the next ones

The third won't stay here either

And the fourth will be just like me

The fifth and sixth will move out,

Now tell me, whose is this house?

At the Tauernhof we teach a holistic Christianity, especially in the context of the mountains, caves, streams and forests. The big advantage with that is that we can make use of the written word of God (the Bible), the created word of God (nature) and the life born out of Him (people) to recognise him as the creator of every living thing. There are hundreds if not thousands of parallels between these wonderful revelations of God. I don't want to see Christ-centred experiential education just as a method because far more than that it describes how to live a healthy life in a world as it really is.

God's will for our lives is that we live with him, reign with him, work with him and rest with him.

2 Dependency gives freedom

I just want to show with a short example how Christ-centred experiential education can help.

We usually value dependency as a weakness, something that should be avoided at all cost. Independency on the other hand is seen as a virtue.

For a few years I have been running Outdoor Education weeks for recovered alcoholics (even after years of not drinking an alcoholic is still an alcoholic). I once explained in a lecture that the living faith is similar to a total dependency on him. This really upset the listeners. One participant was almost angry about that statement and told me, that he had been dependant on alcohol all his life and that this complete dependency almost destroyed his life. Now I had the cheek to preach a total dependency when he had just, with the biggest effort, managed to overcome his old dependency on alcohol. To him, dependency was solely something threatening that he wanted to avoid at all cost. Most of the listeners agreed with him as they had had the same experiences.

The next day I announced the plan for the day, passed out harnesses, karabiners, helmets and ropes and then we went to a climbing crag. There we taught the necessary knots and demonstrated how to abseil down. Soon the same man that had said he never wanted to be totally dependent on anyone or anything again was abseiling down the crag. While he was hanging off the rope and having great fun abseiling I asked him whether he was aware that he was completely dependent on the rope and me (I was belaying) at that moment. He said yes. I asked further "Is it threatening to be at the mercy of the rope and me?" He replied "No, not at all, because I know that the rope will hold me and I know I can trust you!" I got my knife out of my pocket, set it on the rope and offered him an independent life. I reminded him of the previous evening when he had been so convinced that any dependency was destructive and only independency could lead to a fulfilled life. And so I asked whether he would like to finish the day as a dependent or an independent person. He obviously understood the joke about the knife and was able to laugh about it, but he got to grasp a deep spiritual truth that day.

Whether a dependency is positive or negative, whether it is destructive or life-saving depends on who I am dependent on.

In this case he was dependent on me and the rope. His faith in me and the rope enabled him to move freely on a sheer mountain face, something he would have never been able to do otherwise. Independently of me and the rope all he could have done was to look at the crag and the summit from far away. Now, being dependent on me he enjoyed a completely new perspective, experienced the "Dance on the Mountain", the feeling of "letting yourself fall" in the knowledge and trust that there was someone who wanted only the best for him. He trusted me. He trusted that I was willing and able to hold him and it was only in that faith that he was able to be who he wanted to be. He understood a new truth: Only if you let go you can be held.

This is exactly the same with Jesus Christ. In the gospel of John Jesus says "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15,5)

With this Jesus says that only when we depend on him can we receive a new perspective on life and develop freely the way we were meant to.

The apostle Paul writes in his letter to his spiritual son Timothy: "If we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2. Timothy 2,13) and in the letter to the Philippians he writes: "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4,13).

Paul knew Jesus' character and was convinced that he is always willing and absolutely able to hold him. Our faith and our trust is rooted solely because of Jesus' character. He is trustworthy, because he has never broken a promise. He was and is personified truth, because his words were the same as his deeds. This is why the apostle Paul could say with full confidence: "I know whom I have believed" (2. Timothy 1,12)!

Dependency on a loving, caring God is not threatening but life-saving!

It is not weakness to trust in a rope and your partner, but wisdom. When you hang off a rope you can only get as much out of it as you are depending on your partner. The more you are trusting your partner, the more you can enjoy your time on the crag.

A human can only fulfil his potential if he lives in a complete dependency on his creator and trust in HIM. Cutting yourself off a rope does not result in freedom but death. Ignoring God or trying to explain him away does not result in independency but disorientation.

Therefore, dependency on God does not limit, rather it is the only way for a person to receive the full freedom that God had intended for him. Because in regard to Jesus Christ this truth still stands: I have to let go to be held.

Pop-singer Cliff Richard once said: *"The more we depend on God the more dependable we find He is."*

3 Educating through Experiencing

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Apostle Paul, 1. Thessalonians 5,23)

Many Christians suffer from the dilemma that they might believe in Jesus Christ, his salvation and his resurrection, but that this faith has hardly any effect on how they live their lives. Looking from the outside and judging from their conduct in everyday life there is not a lot of difference between those that believe in God and those that don't know him.

Nowadays I see so much frustration, disappointment and boredom especially in Christians.

The fact that we are meant to be the salt and light of the word is often only found on the pages of the bible but doesn't correlate with our experiences in our normal lives.

This is why the global church quite often seems set in their ways, old-fashioned, dated, legalistic and dead. We might be professing that we are God's people, but we don't live with him. We profess that we belong to Christ, but it is more of a tedious obligation than intrinsically cheerful.

But Christianity is not meant to be about professing God it is much more about living with Him.

In the 20 years of my "career" as a mountain leader and skiing instructor I have had the privilege of meeting the most diverse people. Sometimes I can tell just by the way someone walks and how well they are kitted out how experienced a participant they are going to be.

For instance, someone could have the newest touring ski, the lightest binding, the shiniest crampons, an avalanche shovel and even an avalanche probe. They might be very knowledgeable and recognise many ski tours from alpine magazines. But as soon as they put on their bindings I know that they have never been on a ski tour, nor have they been in the mountains before.

This is how I feel some people that call themselves Christians are behaving. They go to church on a Sunday, carrying their bible under their arms. They close their eyes and fold their hands while they pray, they sing all the worship songs and loudly join in the creed. They have been baptised, the fish symbol is on their car, the "What Would Jesus Do" bracelet on their wrists, a cross around their necks, devotions on the kitchen table and the radio tuned into the Christian radio channel. But in all this they do not expect God's power in their everyday life, they don't live with God - they have never been on a "skiing tour"!

What we confess is one thing, how we live is a completely different thing.

Being a Christian doesn't mean that it is a subject that must be learnt (confession of faith) but a life that must be lived (lifestyle).

This phenomenon of swapping a real relationship with the living God with traditions, symbols, rules and laws has been repeating itself throughout the church history and in every generation.

That's why we need to get intrinsically biblical once again. We must not differentiate between a "worldly life" and a "spiritual life"; we must see our lives as a whole. To use a modern term: it must be a "holistic life".

A holistic life consists of four aspects – **physical, mental, social and spiritual**.

To live a healthy “holistic” life, a person needs to grow and develop in each of these areas.

As soon as one area gets stimulated more but another gets left behind the whole person becomes vulnerable.

Let’s look at this example: Martin (name has been changed) is a knowledgeable Christian. He reads his Bible and studies commentaries. He is successful in his career and does lots of sports.

However, his studies (mental) and sports (physical) are that important to him that he has hardly any time and energy left to invest into talking and listening to God (spiritual) and others (social). His relationship with God is unsatisfying . His family and friends suffer because of his single-mindedness. He as a whole person becomes vulnerable.

Elsa on the other hand makes time to read her bible a lot, drives from one christian conference to another. She talks about everything with others and looks for a “spiritual” solution for all her problems. Yet Elsa is often frustrated and depressed because she is obese and prays continually for healing for her depression. But her problem isn’t a spiritual one but a physical. She has to accept that her body is a gift of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit and the tool on earth to spread God’s message in the world. She has to learn self-discipline in the physical area (sport and diet), otherwise she and those around her will start to suffer more and more from her one-sided way of looking at life.

God has revealed his will for us that we as his children will mature and heal as a whole, and that is exactly the example Jesus has set for us.

In Luke 2,52 we read this: “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

Jesus grew up well-balanced in each of the areas of his human existence.

He grew in:

- **Wisdom (mental)**
- **Stature (physical)**
- **Favour with God (spiritual)**
- **Favour with man (social)**

Because God is the creator of man he also knows the way we “work” best. He knows the different aspects of being a human. Because through Jesus Christ God came to earth, became human and showed us through his life how we can live as humans on this earth in the right way.

The most distinguishing characteristic of the life of Jesus as a human on the earth was his absolute dependency on his father in heaven.

He says in the gospel of John: “By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.” (John 5,30). Jesus didn’t consider one aspect of his life as more important than another but made himself dependent on his father in every one of them.

It is true that the bible describes our body as the least important aspect of our lives, for instance when the apostle Paul says “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (1. Timothy 4,8). However, physical training is described as less important only because we won’t need to rely on our body after

life on earth. All the areas of our lives you can't see, our spirit, soul and thinking, are the areas that will exist forever. But as long as we are at home in our earthly bodies they are as valuable as our soul and spirit. Because right here and now I can only express my love to God and others through my body.

This is why we shouldn't consider one area of our lives as unimportant while we are on earth but see each area as a gift from God, that we should be grateful for and enjoy. If a Christian concentrates solely on the spiritual area (prayer, bible study, meditation) and neglects the physical or social area then the whole person isn't healthy. On the other hand if a non-christian keeps his body healthy, educates himself mentally and is socially engaged, the whole person won't be healthy because he rejects a relationship with God.

The results of an empirical study by Abraham Maslow, one of the most influential psychologists of the 20th century are interesting:

What is health?

Doctors and psychologists deal almost exclusively with ill people and the causes for illnesses. Abraham Maslow, one of the most influential psychologists of the 20th century once asked himself the question why we take such little notice of healthy people. Perhaps you could gain new insights by studying them to understand how to be more spiritually healthy. So he started a study across many years to research the constitution of health on healthy people.

His results were remarkable. Psychologically healthy people have in common the following characteristics:

- They have a more efficient perception of reality
Ability to judge people and situations correctly.
- They possess an acceptance of self, others and nature
Lack of protective mimicry, defensiveness or pose. Aversion to artificiality, lies, hypocrisy, straining for effect
- They possess spontaneity, simplicity and naturalness
will never allow for a social convention to get in the way of their doing something important. Humility.
- They are problem centered
Task and problem centred, not self centred
- They have a need for privacy
They can be solitary without discomfort
- They are autonomous, active and growth orientated
independence of culture and environment. Growth and performance orientated
- They possess a continued freshness of appreciation
basic assets of life are valued with awe, pleasure and wonder
- They have been shaped by mystic experiences
loss of self and experiences of transcendence
- They have a feeling of community
a deep feeling of identification, sympathy, and affection
- They can obliterate the ego boundaries
Intensive interpersonal relations
- They live with a democratic character structure
Friendly with anyone regardless of class, race, education or faith

- They are strongly ethical
definite moral standards. They seem to have an innate sense of right and wrong
- Their humour is philosophical not hostile
They do not laugh at hostile humour or superiority humour
- Healthy people are without exception creative
They resist peer pressure

The correlation between spirituality and health

Maslow was neither a mystic nor a particularly religious person. He was a scientist to the core. It was completely new territory for him to come across spiritual experiences in the people he examined.

Christ-centred experiential education is about this holistic personhood.

I don't want to come up with new principals, methods or theories in this book but want to pick up on old, self-evident truths.

Being a Christian comprises all aspects of my life and none of them can be excluded or neglected if I want to live healthily in a world as it is rather than how I want it to be.

Christ-centred experiential education wants to merge word and deed. We should recognise and physically experience what the word of God looks like in our everyday lives. I think this quote by Goethe is very suitable:

"In the beginning was the Word." I read.

But here I stick! Who helps me to proceed?

The Word--so high I cannot--dare not, rate it,

I must, then, otherwise translate it,

If by the spirit I am rightly taught.

It reads: "In the beginning was the thought."

But study well this first line's lesson,

Nor let thy pen to error overhasten!

Is it the thought does all from time's first hour?

"In the beginning," read then, "was the power."

Yet even while I write it down, my finger

Is checked, a voice forbids me there to linger.

The spirit helps! At once I dare to read

And write: "In the beginning was the deed."

The best definition of truth that I have been able to find so far is this: When word and deed become one! If what I think and say is the same as what I experience and do. One way to teach this is Christ-centred experiential education.

I want to give another example how this can work practically. Pedagogy is the science or the art of education. One direction within pedagogy is experiential education.

This direction tries to convey values through experiences, i.e. you are trying to educate through experience. This means that the more senses are being stimulated the deeper the lesson will imprint itself.

This can be seen well in the example of abseiling.:

- a. The mountain guide explains the quality of the rope while the participants listen. The sense of hearing is being addressed. Listening is by the way still the most important way to put across values, especially spiritual truths. Paul says "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." (Romans 10,17). This is why Jesus reiterated so many times: "Whoever has ears, let them hear."
- b. The participant watches the rope and the mountain guide demonstrating how to abseil. They can see with their own eyes that the rope will hold. They use their sense of sight.
- c. The participant takes the rope in their hands and practices using the climbing gear. They touch and feel the rope. Another one of the senses is being used.
- d. When the participant lets go and trusts the rope for the first time to hold them, their sense of smell and taste experiences their wet, sweaty hands and their dry mouths.

All five senses have been addressed. However, the quantity of senses is not as important as the Intensity of the use of them.

There are several models within experiential education and there are different opinions as to which one has the highest educational value. I want to describe five of these models or levels of experiencing an experience. The difference between them isn't the type of activity but their goals, namely what is supposed to be learned through the experience.

1. Just for fun.
The activity is being done solely to experience it.
2. The mountains speak for themselves.
The experience in itself will positively influence the person
3. Back to nature
The experience is primarily meant to bring you closer to nature, experience nature
4. Outward Bound
The experience is processed and helps to cope with everyday life
5. Upward Bound
The focal point is experiencing God.

3.1 Just for fun

This is the sort of experience that is offered by adventure schools, mountaineering schools or travel businesses. Its selling point is to experience something that will give you an adrenaline high, to see something new and to find out what it feels like to go rafting, canyoning, bungeejumping, caving, trekking etc. For years I earned my daily bread doing these sorts of activities and enjoyed it. But it is only the first step in experiencing an experience as it has no other goal than “having fun”.

3.2 The mountains speak for themselves

The second step is to make yourself aware of what you have experienced. This quite often happens spontaneously after an activity or in the evening over a beer. You start talking about the experience of being in a cave, what emotions you felt when you jumped off a 5 metre board into the cold water or what impressions the countryside and nature made on you. Maybe you talk about how someone else reacted, where you felt frustrated, angry or scared. But that would be the exception.

In this model you trust that the mountain and the experience in itself are enough to positively influence a person. “Taking on a challenge” and “proving yourself” are the sorts of values that are being taught with this method.

However, the most important element of experiential education is missing in this method, namely the support of how to use the experience in your everyday life and how these exceptional circumstances (in the cave or on a rope) can be transferred to your own life. This is why we sometimes call this model “minimalistic education”.

3.3 Back to Nature

Another factor comes into play in some experiential education establishments. The models I just described “use” nature for their activities to enable certain experiences. Nature is a means to an end. Some establishments put an emphasis on not just using the experiences for education but making the goal nature in itself. This would then be classed as experiential education and environmental education. A modern term for this is “back to nature”.

This “being one with nature” is very on trend right now.

People want to walk to deserted places with snowboots and sledge dogs to sleep in an igloo they built themselves. They want to integrate themselves into nature rather than conquering it.

These sorts of programmes are very popular at the moment and people are ready to pay lots of money to have that experience. The focal point of this model is usually the physical toughening and the sense of community. Nature is seen as an alterable entity and the human complies to it.

However, there is a tendency in some circles of fusing experience and esotericism. There are more and more catch phrases in books or brochures about experiential education like “feel eternity” or “find yourself” through placing yourself in hostile environments like mountains, gorges and caves. They use expressions like “mother earth” or “back to the roots”, but those expressions never get defined any further.

I was lecturing at a congress about experiential education in Kassel years ago when an experiential education practitioner approached me who was outraged about my conviction that Jesus Christ

should be the centre of experiential education and called me one-sided and arrogant. She did not mince her words and remarked that the bible and Jesus Christ are nonsense and no intelligent person could believe in them. She had never looked at the bible and wasn't ready to read a single verse of it. I asked her what she believed in and she replied with full conviction: "Mother Earth..." As I asked her to explain to me who or what was meant by "Mother Earth" and kept digging deeper her answer got more and more "thin". Expressions like "Mother Earth" are powerful buzzwords but their content is often very superficial.

3.4 Outward Bound

The phrase "Outward Bound" derives from the nautical term that described a ship that was soon to depart the comfort of home port. Kurt Hahn, a name that is found in every book about experiential education and who is coined the "father of experiential education", called his short term educational school at the western coast of Wales "Outward Bound". Since then this name is being used for schools and establishments that have been impacted by Hahn.

Kurt Hahn's highest educational goal was not lessons and teaching but influencing a character to live a responsible lifestyle. Incidentally he used the same approach as God does with us humans.

I always think it is so exciting to see that all good educational and psychological principles have their origin in our creator God.

This shouldn't surprise us really, as who could understand the creation better than its creator? With that, Hahn is certainly not the "inventor" of experiential education but his principles have systemised the classic experiential education.

This is a summary of the four basic principles of Hahn:

3.4.1 Rescue Service

The most distinguishing characteristic and the most important element of his experiential learning was the Rescue Service. Hahn believed that a youth can find himself in the service of others. This was being practised in Rescue Services like First Aid, lifeguarding etc

3.4.2 Physical Training

One of the declines of urban youth was (and is) the decline of fitness and low resilience. Consequently, sports was an important part of his therapy. This was meant to teach self-discipline and finding yourself among other things.

3.4.3 Projects

A further important element of his theory of education was to give youths a practical task. This gave them the practical skills as well as teaching them creativity, diligence and patience.

3.4.4 Expedition

Participants would have to for instance plan a trip lasting several days, prepare for it and then execute it. No matter whether on the sea, on a river or on a mountain, whether by foot, on skis or in a boat the main point was for the participants to take initiative and through executing their plan being confronted with the consequences of their decisions.

Outward Bound has the person in its centre. The experience and adventure are a means to an end. Through intensive physical exercise you get to know your limits and how to overcome weaknesses. The end goal of Outward Bound is to convey the feeling of “I can do this” and “I can accept myself with my weaknesses”.

You learn how to process personal experiences and how to draw up parallels to normal life through specifically applied communication and meditation techniques. Discussions and feedback, or “Reflections” are used particularly to enable the transfer of what you have experienced into your everyday life.

To show that these programmes are about more than just the raw experience the new term of “Outward Bound plus” is being used.

3.5 Upward Bound

The christ-centred experiential education incorporates all of the listed models and all the elements of Hahn’s experiential education.

Just one essential, or rather the most essential revelation is added: We recognise that the experience, nature and humankind are not able to alter us but that the only “alterable entity” is the creator of all these (experience, nature and humankind). Because only God can reach our “deepest sense” through our five senses. In the Old Testament the “Teacher” says: “He has also set eternity in the human heart” (Ecclesiastes 3,11)! And a person can find true peace only if that “eternity in us”, that deepest sense is being touched and filled with God himself. Saint Augustine formulated it so beautifully: “our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

With Christ-centred experiential education we want to show people the way to that rest and stimulate as many senses as possible to get there. Technically speaking we don’t go a step further than the other models, we just draw them to the logical conclusion. We close the circle.

In Christ-centred experiential education, God, the creator of all things, is the centre. He is the one that changes, renews, keeps you strong and gives you a hope to work toward. It’s not about becoming one with myself or with nature but about becoming one with God.

Shortly before his crucifixion and resurrection Jesus revealed this secret to his disciples: “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (John14,20).

This is the reason for the name Upward Bound as we are not primarily bound outwards (towards nature or other people) but upwards to God, our father and his son Jesus Christ.

I now want to illustrate the five levels of experiencing an experience with the example of a caving expedition:

We are in a cave in the south face of the Dachstein with 30 participants, 4 group leaders and one cave leader. This is a cave that is not open for tourism, which means you need the appropriate kit and a cave leader that knows the cave to be able to go into it.

“Just for fun”

Most participants will be confronted with a completely unknown situation which makes this caving expedition an experience of high quality in itself. The complete darkness, the narrow passages, the fact that there is 1000 metres of mountain above them, deep gorges, the complete dependency on light and the strong winds in the narrow passages, all of this will make a strong impression on the participants. None of them is likely to forget these hours in the cave for the rest of their lives.

“The mountains speak for themselves”

Almost without exception there will be a spontaneous exchange between the participants during or after the caving expedition. They will talk about how they felt and you will hear sentences like: “I felt sick when I looked down” or “I almost wet my pants when I had to crawl through that squeeze”. With others you can almost see the sheer fear (especially claustrophobia) in their eyes and they need a lot of encouragement and willpower to overcome those fears. They will talk about what they have experienced and felt and then they part. A normal cave expedition led by a cave leader will end here and with it the education if you can call it education.

“Back to nature”

What did the cave teach me? Maybe it made you respect nature in a new way and instilled the wish in you to preserve the beauty of it for your children. Maybe it made you realise that the mountain isn't “against you on principle” but that you have to learn to behave appropriately according to your surroundings, to wear the proper clothes, to be proficient in the necessary techniques, to rely upon your partner.

Perhaps the beauty and enormity of nature teach some participants humility. They are in awe of the dimensions of the cave, they are surprised by the peace and by how cut off you are from “life outside in the sun”. They realise that life without sun could not exist and just how dependent you are on the tiny flame of the acetylene lamp.

All these things can be learnt with or without any words of the guide. The only question is whether those realisations on their own will influence everyday life on a long term basis.

Outward Bound

This is when you analyse the experience and what you felt as well as talking about it in a reflective feedback. It often takes a lot of empathy to lead such a discussion as things get personal. Usually the reflective feedback should happen straight after the activity but you can also use it during. You would ask the participant for instance: “Why were (are) you unsure? Where did this fear come from?” “Is your fear rational or irrational?” “Is it because you don't trust your guide or is it the darkness or the dirt?” With these questions you can help the participant to get to know themselves. They could always be guided by fear, are scared and sceptical by nature. Maybe they even suffer from an irrational fear and this can help them conquer that fear.

Another question that can be helpful to the participants could be: “What made you do it even though you were afraid?” Often the answer will be the community, the trust in the guide or simply jumping over their own shadow. Questions like: “Would you do it again? Why? Why not?” can help

the group leader and the participant to get to know who they really are (sometimes for the first time).

It is crucial to then talk about how this experience and self-knowledge can be utilised (transferred) to their normal lives. E.g. a participant could resolve to push themselves to practice fellowship with other Christians again. Another will learn to concentrate only on the next step, just like in the cave, instead of trying to plan their whole life ahead, to live in the present and start with what is first instead of trying to make sense of the whole of the dark future.

There's dozens more examples that I can't expand on now. But those two examples show the principle by which the experiential learning model operates.

Upward Bound

Christian experiential learning obviously comprises all the levels described in 3.1 to 3.4. The participants experience and enjoy the beauty of the cave, they talk to each other about it. In the feedback the experience is analysed and they come up with possible consequences of how to transfer realisations on to their everyday lives. But that is not all.

The main concern of christian experiential learning is to point the participants to the one who made everything they experienced and saw possible in the first instance – to God.

Knowing God the father and his son Jesus Christ does not only mean that you have eternal life but it also gives you the best possible quality of life here and now.

Surely you know those "holy moments" where you watch a sunset and are completely overwhelmed by the beauty of your surroundings. Sometimes it's a flower meadow, the ambience of the sky, the bubbling water of a brook or even the inside of a cave. In those moments you long to express that inner joy, to pass it on to someone that you love. So often I wish that my wife or my children were with me when I am once again overpowered by the beauty of creation. Jesus said in Matthew 12,34: "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." It almost hurts to experience such joy but not being able to express or pass on that joy, when there is nobody that you can thank for it.

We can't hug the mountain and we won't kiss the cave Eitgerm but we can become quiet and thank the one who made all of this and love him wholeheartedly.

To thank God, to appreciate him in love is not just the highest virtue of humans but satisfies our deepest longing at the same time. The bible calls this grateful attitude towards God "worship".

The aim of christian experiential learning is to point people to that creator, to lead them to him. A caving expedition is ideal for this. Light and darkness can be experienced in such intensity, a topic the Bible talks about a lot. The big advantage of a cave is that you don't need to explain darkness. When we get to the final destination, the Ramsauer Dome, we ask all participants to turn off their acetylene lamps. Once the last one has been turned off there is a complete darkness. Not many people have experienced such total darkness before because even in a dark night there is always a residue of light left in the sky. Everyone can see and feel the darkness. Some feel similarly as the astronaut who recounts from the dark side of the moon: "It is so dark it hurts". In "our" cave it is not just dark but cold. The temperature inside the cave depends on the average temperature outside the cave which for the south face of the Dachstein is 1 degree Celsius. This is why caves in lower areas and more southern countries are much warmer than caves high up in the mountains.

In addition to that the air humidity inside the Dachstein cave is at 99%. This means it is dark, cold and wet – not a place you would want to live. In this darkness I tell my group biblical stories,

parables from the gospels and the good news about the Father of the Light (see chapter 7 Cave stories).

4 Experiential learning by Kurt Hahn and the teachings of the Bible

“The Bible is not true because evangelists and apostles teach it; they taught it because it is true. The written records have to be explained by its inner truth and all the written records can’t give it any if it doesn’t have any.” G.E. Lessing

An educational theory that wants to convey knowledge about God has to be consistent with the biblical fundamentals. If we in christian experiential learning want to use the principles of Kurt Hahn, then those principles need to be examined on the basis of the Bible. Going through the elements of Hahn’s educational theory one by one will show that this is the case.

Rescue Service

Hahn was convinced that a person will find themselves in the service of others. Rescue Service was the most important element in his theory of experiential learning.

Professor Doctor Viktor Frankl, a psychologist and the founder of logotherapy explained this principle like this: “The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself”

We are probably impressed by this view on life and should be but we have to know that this truth hasn’t been around only since Frankl or Hahn but from before. When asked what the highest law is Jesus replies: “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22,39) and in Matthew 10, 39 we read: “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”

Physical Training

Sports and Physical Training is a very big part of Hahn’s Experiential Learning Theory. It is almost commonplace nowadays that physical training increases your quality of life as well as aiding your psychological help. According to a study, every second American is obese and I’m afraid that the statistics in Europe are no better. This should be a wake up call especially to those Christians that regard the body as an unimportant or even “sinful” part of being a human. Our body is important, as it is the only tool we have in this life to give God the glory and to be a blessing to others.

We find this realisation that we should care for our body in the Bible.

In the short letter that John wrote to his friend Gaius, he wishes him physical and mental health. “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.” (3 John 1,2).

God does not care solely for our soul and spirit but also for our body: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless”. This quote from 1 Thessalonians 5,23 is the motto of our UPward bound programmes.

Projects

One of the best paedagogical possibilities these days is to entrust a sensible project to youths. Hahn recognised this in the 40s and 50s. This principle carries through the whole Bible as a central theme. Interestingly you will not read “be good” in the Scriptures a single time, instead it is always: “do good”. That’s because “being good” is useless if it doesn’t show itself in deeds. James puts it in a nutshell in James 1,22: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”. And Jesus himself said in John 15,14: “ You are my friends if you do what I command.”

I want to further illustrate this point with a few examples of our work at the Tauernhof:

For instance, we clean hiking trails or build new tracks where they have been destroyed through storms and landslides with participants from the Upward Bound programme. As part of our intensive bible schools the students regularly need to participate in projects in retirement homes and in hospitals as well as taking responsibility in community services within the local families. Every now and again spontaneity is asked for. When there was the disastrous flooding in August 2002 we stopped our programme for the 60 participants we had at that point. Instead of going caving and doing bible study we filled sacks full of sand and with that helped the general public to minimise the damage. This activity was not just important practically for the victims of the floodings but also of high educational value to the participants.

We realise time and time again that to many of the participants these voluntary projects are the highlight of the whole programme here. It is extraordinary to do something without being paid for it. To do something positive for the community without getting any special recognition. The truth of what Jesus said becomes visible here: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20, 35). In my understanding such activities are essential to life as a Christian. I call it "practical Christianity".

It would be good if lots of young people had the opportunity to mature their personality and develop a healthy attitude towards the general public through (temporary) voluntary work. Unfortunately, it is quite hard for us who are interested to take on such tasks. By now it is almost legally impossible, as no one believes that you are prepared to do a job without expecting to be paid for it. Additionally, voluntary work can be seen as a rival to those who do a similar job to earn a living. For example, when I once reported at an evangelical conference that our students clean the flats of people in need free of charge, some of the attendees were outraged. This outlook within our community is rather regrettable.

The expedition

Hahn's fourth element was the expedition. This is, looking at it from the outside, probably the most remarkable aspect of UPward Bound. The reason for this is not that it is the most important aspect, rather that it is the thing that makes it the easiest to "sell" to people. It is easily presented and it correlates with the trend of "risk is fun". When undertaking an expedition, it is essential to give the group only as much information and material as absolutely necessary. As long as they are safe, the group should be independent in planning and preparing, as well as executing and post-processing the expedition.

This is how Jesus prepared his disciples for an "expedition", when he sent 70 of them in pairs throughout the whole country, so that they could pass on the good news and heal the ill and demon-possessed. (Luke 10,1)

We can see that the principles of Hahn's experiential education theory and the principles of the Bible correspond. In the next chapter I want to highlight their differences.

5 Differences between Outward Bound and UPward Bound

5.1 Different core assumptions

“To go deeper in the Christian life, is simply to realize that we are bigger sinners than we ever thought, and that Jesus is a bigger Saviour than we ever conceived him to be.”

Roy Hession

The classical paedagogical theories are based on the assumption that every person is essentially good and because of that they are able to be taught how to act correctly. This belief, that a person can be made to act correctly through logical and rational reasoning (because they are essentially good) might seem like an obvious and logical conclusion on the face of it. But the Bible tells us exactly the opposite and our own practice and that of the people around us seems to emphasise this.

I have three children that, I believe I can say this, have grown up in a very loving and safe environment. Interestingly, I did not have to teach any of those three children how to lie, they were able to do that “automatically”. But I have had to remind them (and myself) again and again to be truthful. Somehow, the selfish streak of humans comes all by itself; out of the inside.

This confirms to me the words of Jesus: “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7,11).

Jesus says that humans are essentially bad but know how to do good. Many people believe the exact opposite, namely that humans are essentially good but because of their surroundings etc do bad things.

I can influence or even change behaviour patterns through education but the person stays the same. When I was eighteen and had to serve for eight months in the federal armed forces, I became accustomed to a few beneficial behaviour patterns very quickly. These behaviour patterns, even though I couldn’t stand them, saved me from punishment and guaranteed a relatively comfortable life in the military. Outwardly I conformed to standards, but inwardly I still rebelled.

This reminds me of the story in which a father drives in his car with his son. The ten-year-old son is standing behind his father in front of the seat and does not want to sit down and strap himself in. The father warns his son to sit down immediately, but the son doesn’t react. The father repeats his warning in a more strict tone, but again the son is still standing. Now the father has had enough and warns the boy that if he does not sit down something bad would happen. The boy finally sits down and says: “On the outside I’m sitting but on the inside I am still standing!”

That’s exactly how I felt in the army.

Christ-centred Experiential Education works off of the assumption that humans are essentially bad and not able to make themselves into good humans through their own effort. That is why we take Jesus’ offer seriously, when he says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11, 28).

We can find true peace and godly serenity if we come to Jesus Christ and receive life from him “life to the full” (compare John 10,10).

The word of God continues on to say that a human has not only got a problem or is ill but that he is “dead in his sins”.

- Ephesians 2, 1: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...”,
- Ephesians 2, 4+5: “But ... God ... made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”
- Colossians 2,13: “When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ.”

A human might be alive in body and soul but dead in regards to his relationship to the Creator and with that cut off from the origin of all life. A dead person does not need good advice or a band-aid here or there, a dead person needs new life. Positive thinking might give us temporary relief. Jesus Christ gives us new life, life to the full.

I read in a magazine the story of a skyscraper where someone discovered a crack in the facade of the 42nd story. The care taker informed a builder immediately and waited for the engineer in the 42nd story. When he was still waiting an hour later, he went back down to the reception desk to call again. But he was informed that the engineers had been surveying the foundations in the basement for half an hour already. It turned out that part of a load-bearing foundation wall had been removed. The underground car park attendant was building his own house and every day he took a few of the bricks of this seemingly useless wall home to build his house. I don't know whether this story is true or not. It is crucial though that we recognise this principle: We are often so busy “plastering over cracks” but ignore the root of the problem. God begins his work with the foundations, not the facade. God wants our heart not our behaviour. Correct behaviour is the consequence of a new heart.

The way Jesus analyses our hearts is very sobering: “But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person....” (Matthew 15, 18-20)

And that is why God's offer to us is this: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekiel 36, 26+27)

This means that in unity with Jesus Christ a person is enabled to do what is right in God's eyes. It is not just our own effort to change ourselves. Rather God works actively in our lives and creates something new, something that wasn't there before, namely life! A life through God's power, to be a blessing for this world.

5.2 Different objectives

Go in this my strength... If the Lord wants to entrust a lot to you then he will lead you so that with every step you will say: “Lord, I can't do it, Lord, it is impossible, Lord, I won't make it!” And he will reply: “Go in this my strength! Everything is ready, come!”

Even though the classical experiential education theory draws on biblical principles, the objectives of OUTward Bound and UPward Bound are oppositional. The way is similar, the result is not.

In Hahn's experiential education theory the objective is to help the person to become independent, to let them discover their own strengths and to accept themselves with their weaknesses.

The objective on the Christ-centered experiential education is to lead the human, as a created being, to "freedom within the dependency on God" (see chapter 2).

Paradoxically, a human can experience the biggest possible freedom not in finding themselves but only in losing themselves. It is not about developing your own strengths (that are pretty limited anyway) but about discovering God's greatness and honouring him. If my future is only as big as I am, then it is too small. But if I recognise that Christ, the risen one, is present today and lives in me, then my future is as big as God himself. This is a life in which you will start to reach for the stars, a truly exciting life.

I don't have to keep telling myself that I am not as bad as I think I am. Rather, I can confess my failure to God. Because I have already been accepted with all my weaknesses by a loving God-father, I can express even the deepest darknesses of my life honestly and accept myself.

Most people live so that they can be loved; as a Christian I can live because I am loved. I don't have to try to take control of my life through my own strength, rather I have a faithful brother, friend and Saviour at my side. In the dependency on this loving Lord I can become the person that God intended from the beginning.

The primary objective of the classical experiential education is to know yourself and to realise yourself.

The primary objective of Christ-centered experiential education is to know God and to realise Christ in your life.

In the gospel of John Jesus says: "Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (John 12,25).

Even if the classical experiential education theory draws on biblical principles (whether consciously or not) both the source and the aim of OUTward Bound and UPward Bound are completely oppositional. The way is very similar, the result is not.

6 Experiential Education helps to perceive truth

[In the original the word for “perceive” does not have the connotation of it being subjective. Rather it means that you see, understand and accept something for what it truly is. -t/n]

Eyes that look are common, eyes that see are rare.

J. Oswald Sanders

If you can see things the way they really are and not how people portray them, then you are wise and God is your teacher.

Thomas a Kempis

Things are rarely what they seem to be: That is why people confuse education with intelligence, wealth with luck and sex with love.

6.1 Perceiving spiritual principles

6.1.1 Trust and dependency

It is relatively easy to teach the principle of trust and dependency through experiential education. It becomes most apparent when climbing and abseiling. We, as the leaders, pass on the responsibility for belaying exclusively to the participants, whilst our job is to supervise them in that activity. The two rope partners are immediately aware that they are now trusting each other with their lives and that this exercise is not possible without a leap of faith. This mutual dependency usually influences the relationship between two people very positively. That’s also the reason why I am close friends with mountain leader colleagues or mountaineering mates with whom I have completed some hard climbs. This absolute co-dependency can produce a beautiful friendship. I am an advocate for doing these kinds of exercises with married couples. This way the spouse can become a friend.

In 1998, in addition to our experiential education programme “HOEHENWEG”, we had a group of teenagers staying at the Tauernhof. A 14-year-old boy, let’s call him Tim, told me on the first evening that he was going to shave off all his hair while staying at the camp. I asked him to wait about this until he was back at home and he promised me he would.

The next morning he was at breakfast with half his head shaven. This way he hadn’t broken his promise. On the second day, Tim managed to kill our goldfish and I had a conversation with the manager of the neighbouring youth hostel because “our boy” had threatened one of his guests with a knife. None of the other participants could stand Tim, bad things were said about him and everyone was avoiding him like the plague. It got so bad that the others wanted to hang him up in our cherry tree, but I managed to persuade them not to do that.

Finally, it was climbing and abseiling on the agenda. We always paired two and two together for the climbing elements. It was fascinating to see that every participant accepted Tim and trusted him with their life. Tim noticed this too, and he realised that he was taken seriously. Not a bad word was said the whole day and the relationship between the participants got considerably better from that day forward.

These boys experienced, just like the recovered alcoholics in chapter 2, that dependency on and trust in others does not threaten or constrict our lives. Rather that through it we experience friendship, joy, love and with that make up true life.

This being bound together (literally, when you're climbing) doesn't take our freedom, rather it enables true freedom. Committing yourself to someone else in trust, does not restrict our self-realisation, but enables it.

Jesus once said: "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8,36). Committing yourself to Jesus and fully trusting him that he wants the best for me does not restrict my life rather it enables me to fulfil it.

6.1.2 Absolutes and obedience

Some educators and psychologists flinch when they hear the word "absolute" because they automatically associate something negative with that term. Not without good reason, as people used to and still are being subjugated and abused in the name of "absolute values" or "total obedience". However, the older I get and the more I get to know myself and the people around me, the more I am convinced that mankind is yearning for absolute values. We need and look for them continuously because without absolute values we lose orientation and ultimately our minds. For absolute values to be live-saving and life-benefiting it requires a loving and caring authority as a source.

In our humanistic view of mankind absolute values, fundamentalism and authority are seen as such a red rag to a bull because in the history of mankind authority has been misused time and time again and people have been exploited, subjugated and prosecuted in the name of absolute values, be it in communism or religion. God has never done that, only humans have. This is, by the way, another indication that humans are essentially bad, not good.

I will stay with Tim and the group of teenagers to demonstrate how you can use Christ-centered Experiential Education to teach absolute values and obedience. This particular group of teenagers didn't pay much attention to my instructions. Before we started the expedition over several days we explained in detail what they had to take with them and what had to stay behind. But as was to be expected some forgot their tent poles, others their bread and one person came without his walking boots. When we arrived at the summit, we explained how to put up the tent and what they needed to consider so that they would stay dry.

Those who left their tent poles just laughed a bit and then crawled into their sleeping bags in their tents like bivvy bags. That night it started to pour down with rain and at 3 am the three boys sought shelter in the neighbouring tent. So for the rest of the night the six of them were crammed into a three-man-tent. The next day they were wet, cold and sleep-deprived.

We sat down together, in an empty cowshed, where I explained to them that we have their best interest at heart when we give them instructions. As I went on to tell them how they could fix their problem for now they were suddenly very attentive and observed everything I told them. They were not just hearing but listening. They understood that obedience isn't something negative but serves to protect and bless them.

I have never had any issues with participants being attentive and obedient when I demonstrate how to tie a knot correctly while climbing so that it won't come undone when it has to withstand my weight. I sometimes jokingly invite the participants to behave like "free citizen" and design their own knot the way they think it should be done. Interestingly, they don't want to do that but ask me to double-check their knot several times before they let the rope catch them.

We discover through this experiment pretty quickly that following absolute norms does not restrict lives but is a prerequisite for life. I keep hearing this accusation in regards to God, Jesus and the Bible: "It's all too restrictive. You Christians are too narrow-minded and petty!"

I have to concede that there are indeed some Christians that are narrow-minded and petty, but that doesn't mean that Christianity has to be that way. I know men that are petty, but that doesn't mean that all men are petty. And before some women might feel like they have to say something, I would like to add that I also know some narrow-minded women.

If you only see Jesus Christ as the founder of a new religion who died 2000 years ago and if you see Christianity as a religion in which you have to keep as many laws as possible, then that accusation might be justified. However, and this is the essence of the gospel, Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is in the best of health these days; he lives! Christianity doesn't mean anything other than to live your everyday life in obedience to the Risen One and to enjoy fellowship with Him. If we recognise that, then we will understand Jesus' words as he says: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8, 32).

6.1.3 Boundaries are aids

God gave us humans boundaries from the onset to preserve life. One of the first commandments God gave mankind was: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2,16+17).

This first boundary wasn't given to mankind to cut off their freedom but to keep them safe. Adam (Adam "the man") had the freedom to eat the fruit of thousands of trees as much and as often as he wanted to. He just had to keep away from this one tree. But somehow it is in mankind's nature to want exactly what they are not allowed, even if it is harmful to them.

Lots of people have lost their lives by trying to push or ignore boundaries. Spiritually speaking it is the reason all of our lives are lost because of when Adam ignored God's boundary.

It is very easy to teach how boundaries preserve lives instead of repressing it through Christ-centered Experiential Education. Dozens of people pay with their lives every year in the mountains because they ignore boundaries or overstep them.

When I warn a ski trip group to stay at least 3 meters away from the edge of the snowdrift, I do this to preserve their lives not to rob them of their freedom. On a deep snow descent it might be tempting to ski on a beautiful slope. However, if at that moment, I know that that slope is in danger of an avalanche, then I have to limit the freedom of the participants and escape to a different, less spectacular slope. Even if some participants are feeling sorry that they missed out, no one has ever

been angry with me; the overall reaction was gratitude. Because they have understood: boundaries are helpful!

Paul says an interesting sentence in regards to the freedom of the believers in 1. Corinthians 10,23: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify." (NKJV).

Even if lots of things are allowed, it is not always wise to do those things. In living your life as a Christian, it is not important to follow rules and commandments, but to recognise that God means well with us and that he has set boundaries for us so that we can live.

6.1.4 Disobedience carries consequences

The apostle Paul cites the prophet Isaiah when he says: "Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." (Acts 28, 26).

It is possible to hear things but not understand them. It is possible to taste things but not enjoy them. It is possible to see things but not perceive them. It is one matter to hear certain truths and understand them on an intellectual level, but it is a completely different matter to experience that same truth and understand it at a deeper level. It is also one thing to have heard of the Lord Jesus and to know about him and a completely different matter to know Jesus personally and experience him in your every day life.

We like to excuse our wrongdoing with saying that we didn't listen properly or that we didn't take something that seriously. Now, we are meant to be generous and be forgiving in the same way that God forgave us, but that does not release us from having to bear the consequences of our "little disobedience".

In our area there lives an adder that is venomous but rather shy and whose poison isn't fatal to humans. We inform our students about the adder and advise them not to catch this little creature. One participant from Canada, and recently also a member of staff, did just that and got bitten whilst catching it. I had to call the helicopter, as we were far up on a mountain, and the persons concerned had to stay in hospital for a week. This incident caused costs and the other participants had to carry the bags of the injured person as well as their own.

On the Lower Tauern, the mountain range on the southside of the Ennstal, you can find the much sought-after edelweiss. One of the tours we do goes through that area. At one point of the tour, on the summit the group leaders leave their groups, give them a map, a compass and the instruction to walk back towards the house as quickly as possible. We also add explicitly that they are not allowed to pick any edelweiss.

On one of those tours it happened that I was walking behind the group unnoticed, to make sure they were on the right way, while the group leaders were heading towards the valley to enjoy a much-needed shower. Suddenly I heard a cry for help and ran as fast as I could towards the cry. My heart almost stopped: three of our participants were hanging about 10-15 meters high on a mountain face and couldn't go back. They had seen some edelweiss and had wanted to pick it. With a few prussik slings I was able to get all three down. When I got to the last one it was only a matter of minutes

before he would have fallen. His whole body was already shivering uncontrollably due to the effort of holding on (we call this the shakes).

Once everyone was back to safety I had a very serious discussion with the people in question and they discovered an important fact: when it comes to issues of life and death I am extremely intolerant.

The consequence of this disobedience could have easily ended in death. At first, the ban on picking edelweiss was just a small matter, something you could laugh about. Had I come half an hour later three young people would have lost their lives due to their disobedience. Those three people perceived something decisive about disobedience and intolerance.

If the word of God warns us to keep away from malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander (1.Peter 2,1), then the reason for that is not that God is petty but because it harms our lives. Furthermore, when it is a matter of eternal life and death God is extremely intolerant. That's why Jesus Christ says: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them." (John 3,36). When it is a matter of life and death, God is extremely intolerant, because he loves us.

6.1.5 Live in the present

Instead of trying to add more years to our lives, we should take care that we get more life into our years.

There is a sentence Jesus once said that has accompanied me for years and that I want to learn anew and practice every day. It is written down in Matthew 6,34: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Jesus does not say that we shouldn't plan or give to welfare, he simply says that we don't have to worry ourselves sick about an uncertain future.

I find it hard not to worry and because of that have failed to live in the present for hours, days and weeks. My worries about tomorrow disable me to be a blessing to those people who are around me here and now. Excessive worry is a sign of little faith. Because I don't believe that God means well with me, I want to take charge of my life myself.

I have learnt so much from my children. One of the prominent things is their ability to live completely in the present, in the knowledge that Mum and Dad are nearby and because of that nothing bad can happen to them.

Every year I go on travels for about 3 months to preach and teach in different churches and on conferences. Sometimes it is possible that the whole family joins me. I will never forget when in 1995 we travelled as a family to Australia, where I was lecturing at a conference in Brisbane. Back then we had two children, Lucas who was five years old and Lisa who was four. When we drove in our car from our town in the mountains on the serpentine roads towards Schladming, it was obvious to Lisa that we would go to the supermarket to do our food shop. That's how it always was. We explained to her that we would go a bit further today and soon came to the motorway towards Salzburg. Now she was sure that we would go to the zoo, because that was what we normally did

when we drove to Salzburg. When we told her in the airplane from Salzburg to Frankfurt that today we would go a whole lot further she believed that we were going to visit Heidi in Frankfurt (Heidi from the movie "Heidi" lived in Frankfurt). In Frankfurt we got on board of something that must have looked to Lisa like a huge hall in which lots of people were sitting. We sat down and for the next 24 hours we stayed sat in that seat. We ate in it, we slept in it and watched movies on the TV. The foreign surroundings must have seemed weird to Lucas and Lisa. But the astounding thing to me was that no matter whether they were sitting in their seats in the airplane, or running around the airport in Singapore, they always enjoyed the moment. They never worried whether we would ever arrive or not. The only thing they kept checking, whether they were waking up in the plane or going down the escalator in Brisbane, was that Mum and Dad were close by. Jesus once said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18,3).

It is exactly this principle of trust that we want to teach with Christ-centered Experiential Education. The participants don't know in detail what they should expect during the week they are spending with us. Of course, they know from the advertisement in the leaflet roughly what they are going to do (e.g. mountain walking, camping, overnight stay at a mountain cabin, etc.). But during the course of the week they only ever get as much information as absolutely necessary. Lots of participants find this very hard because they are used to planning, coordinating and scheduling things. Now they suddenly don't have control of tomorrow and can "schedule" their lives only with difficulty.

When we ask the participants to hand in their watches even "tried and tested Christians" might fib.

But the principle is clear and is described often in the bible. None of us knows what will happen tomorrow, even if we are still alive tomorrow. If you think about it, we have very little control over our future. However much we might believe in this time and age of technology that we have everything under control, even our future, it does not correlate with reality. So it is good to practice having less control and more trust. This works best in an unknown territory. This "unwanted insecurity" might get us back to the "wanted dependency" to God.

We are reminded in Proverbs 3,5: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding!"

If I don't know what tomorrow brings, I can concentrate a lot better on the here and now. So often we live either in the past or already in the future and miss the "today".

One of the most important lessons in our programme is to learn to live in the present, to talk to people that are around me here and now.

In eternity when the "matter of time" is a thing of the past we will live in the "eternal present".

In Hebrews 3,7+8 the holy spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...". It is about the here and now. Tomorrow I might not be here anymore.

6.1.6 Personal responsibility

To teach this principle the "classroom of the mountains" is very suitable. After the participants have been taught for a few days how you move on the mountains, I will then tell them that they are now

responsible for themselves and their safety. They have learnt how to walk along the rocks and how to climb them, how to cross a slab or a snowfield and how to react when you get into difficulty. They have all been practising this and know about the dangers. From then on I will rely on them knowing these skills on future trips. Besides the legal side of it, doing a “public announcement” has an important paedagogical meaning: Many of our participants are from North America where we have been able to witness a dangerous development in the last 20 years. Lawyers try to find people in schools, hospitals and many other institutions that feel aggrieved by a teacher or a doctor so that they can earn money through suing for damages.

For instance, if you are being discharged from hospital after a surgery to remove your appendix it might happen that at the exit of the hospital a lawyer will catch you and ask whether you are still in pain and if the doctor might have made a mistake. If you are willing to sue the doctor he promises you 50% of the compensation if he wins.

Unfortunately, this mentality has spread far and because of that reason many experiential education institutions, especially in North America, have had to close. The risk of keeping them open and the chance of getting dragged into a suing process was too big. If, for instance, a child hurts themselves on a mountain trip, chances are high that the parents will sue. This trend has become more and more visible in Europe, too.

When I worked in the USA (Stratton Mountain, Vermont) years ago as a skiing instructor, something similar happened to me. A woman that had been in my group sued the Stratton-Mountain-Company six months after the course. She was suing because of constant headaches that were supposedly caused by falling several times whilst doing my skiing course. She was of the opinion that I had made her go down a piste that was too hard for her. By chance, I came across a book that she had given me after the course in which she thanked me for the “best week of her life”. However, I don’t know how that lawsuit ended.

This “accusation mentality” obviously destroys any kind of trust between humans and it is the first consequence of a sinful, god-hostile attitude. After turning away from God through their disobedience Adam and Eve hid from their creator. When God asked Adam what he had done, Adam replied: “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” (Genesis 3,12). Subsequently, the woman blamed the snake.

Humankind has not changed. It does not want to bear the consequences of their own decisions and tries throughout their whole life to find a “scapegoat”.

However, all these accusations will have an end when we are standing in front of the holy, just and incorruptible God. That’s why it is in our best interest to recognise now that we are guilty, that we need forgiveness and that we all can only live by grace.

I often say to the participants: “You may earn lots of money in doing this, but you might possibly lose the blessings of God!”

Personal responsibility is an important topic in our time.

The Lord Jesus teaches unmistakably that disobedience towards God has terrible consequences. We read in Galatians 6,7: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”.

And in the letter to the Hebrews its author points out to us that God's word knows and judges our most intimate thoughts and the attitude of our hearts: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4,12).

The way Charles Swindoll puts it is very impactful:

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life.

Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company ...a church ...a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past ...we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way.

We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude ...I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you ...we are in charge of our attitudes."

6.1.7 Faithfulness and Perseverance

"Sometimes God calms the storm, but sometimes God lets the storm rage and calms his child."

One characteristic that is not regarded very highly in relationships these days is faithfulness. It's not "on trend" to be faithful. If there is any conflict you go the path of least resistance and get separated. If being honest and "doing the right thing" doesn't get you anywhere, then you just follow everyone else.

In the past parents wished that their children were good and did good deeds. Today parents want their children to be happy even if they have to compromise on doing what is right.

Parents give their children what they want and believe that that's the way to make them happy, but ultimately they will end up unhappy. Because happiness can only be reached if you have been taught with love and care to do what is right.

Today we live in the "Instant-age". It has become our lifestyle that everything has to happen quickly. We have instant coffee, instant tea, instant eggs. Whole meals can be made "instantly". Whether it is the microwave, emails, lifts or elevators, everything works on being very quick.

Unfortunately, we Christians have adopted this mentality, too. In the morning we quickly read two verses from the daily reading, a quick prayer and a christian CD whilst eating our lunch. And that concludes our lives with God.

Moving in the mountains teaches us something different. Here I have to keep going even if I am tired and exhausted and I have to persevere even if it is cold and wet. I can't press a button and get off. Because you realise the necessity of perseverance, you keep going.

One participant of a skiing trip, who was already pretty tired and shattered at the bottom of another hill came to me and insisted: "Use your connections!" He meant that I should get a snowmobile or a

helicopter. He was a well-known personality and was used to solving problems by using his connections. Well, in the mountains that is different.

As a matter of fact, I did use my connections by getting the group to come together and talking to our God through prayer and saying a few words about “faithfulness and perseverance”. The Lord Jesus promised a big reward to those that are faithful: “ Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.” (Revelation 2,10).

Time and time again I am moved when I witness those participants that have persevered and get to stand underneath the summit cross. What joy, reward and feeling of happiness!

This feeling of happiness can only be felt if I have persevered. There is a verse in the letter of James that all the participants that stay with us learn by heart. It says: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”

The word “perseverance” translates to “ipomeno” in Greek. “Ipo” means “under” or “underneath”, “meno” means “ to stay”. Perseverance means “to stay underneath a certain pressure”, not to give up straight away or to run away.

In regards to UPward Bound this means to stay under the pressure of the heavy rucksack. In regards to life, it can mean for instance to stay faithful in a relationship even if it is hard at the moment and the pressure is mounting up. Or it might mean to keep going with a specific service even if you suffer setbacks. A verse that often encourages me to keep persevering is taken from 1. Timothy 1,12 where Paul says about his own life: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, ..., that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service.”. Faithfulness is a prerequisite for God to put you in his service.

A picture of the summit cross at Ramsau show the words inscribed on it:

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. (Revelations 3,11)

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (Revelations 22,20)

6.1.8 Following Christ carries a cost

I feel it is very valuable to use history in Christ-centred Experiential Education. If a person grasps where they come from, they will find it a lot easier to understand themselves and their environment better. Church history is a very sobering topic and Christians haven’t exactly covered themselves in glory over the centuries. What I take away from church history is the failure of humans on the one side and God’s faithfulness on the other. We also have to be aware that when we look at church history, we tend to concentrate on the catastrophic and negative events and overlook the blessing that came from the church of God. One theologian once put it so aptly as he spoke about church history: “If I were to write a travel guide of Bavaria and depicted a hundred dung heaps in it, then that would not be wrong. However, it would not represent Bavaria.”

Church history in the area where we are around Schladmig and Ramsau is highly interesting. Many of the participants wonder why there is an almost closed evangelical island in the middle of the very catholic Austria. Only about six per cent of the total population of Austria is evangelic. Interestingly

the percentage of denominations had been exactly the opposite around 1600. Almost all of Austria became evangelical at that time.

To understand how that came to happen and to learn to appreciate what people were willing to take upon themselves for the sake of their faith, we do a special exercise with the UPward Bound participants.

Just before it is time to go to bed we instruct them to get their sleeping bags, torches and walking boots and inform them that they will spend the night in the tent. We ask them to not speak a single word until after breakfast the next morning.

At about 11 pm they disappear quietly and happily into their sleeping bags. At 1 am we wake them up and remind them not to speak. Feeling sleepy and disturbed they come into the classroom where I give a lecture about church history, specifically about the reformation and the counter-reformation. I tell them a few stories about prosecution, coercion to Catholicism, and secretive Protestantism in our immediate area. I tell them about the price that many a farmer had to pay when a Bible or a similarly "satanic devotional book" was found in their house. In those times the Christians that lived here took up great exertions to get hold of devotionals or German Bibles. The Bibles were smuggled from Gosau to Ramsau and Schladmig across the so-called "Bibelsteig" (Bible track) that went across a high pass. To achieve this the Christians had to stay quiet and even had to be on the rope for part of it to overcome the steep climbs. Back then you couldn't just meet up as a group of believers. The father of a household would have to be the pastor, preacher, priest and teacher all in one person. The Bible and a few devotional booklets were the only source of spiritual food for the families. They would shut windows and doors on a Saturday night, take the Bibles out of their hiding places and then everyone would gather as the father of the household would read from the Holy Scriptures and explain the words. Afterwards, they would sing, pray and share in communion. The sitting room turned into the temple, the table into the altar, the family into the church and the father into the pastor.

After listening to my lecture, we instruct the participants to look for a walking track, where they will get Bibles, in groups, without talking and whilst being tied together. At about 4 am they are back in their tents. Even though 1 am is probably not the best time to have a lecture, none of the participants will ever forget the gist of the message.

At the moment here in central Europe no one is persecuted because of their faith. But still, a Christian that clearly confesses their faith will receive rejection and contempt.

The apostle Paul said plainly: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3,12).

This is a promise just like all the other ones we find in the Holy Scriptures. But this promise is one that we don't print on birthday cards or calendars. However, if a Christian has never been laughed at because of their faith, if no one has ever made fun of the fact that they believe in Jesus, then I know something about this Christian: they don't talk about Jesus in public!

6.1.9 Being a Christian is impossible

With that, we have now arrived at the most important chapter of the book. Because, if we take all the listed principles of obedience, personal responsibility, faithfulness etc seriously, then we will be confronted with a grave problem, namely: We cannot live like this! The standard is far too high!

At this point, I want to refer again especially to those Christians that take God and his word very seriously but are weary and frustrated because they recognise that they can never even get close to reaching this level of standard. On the one hand we admire the wise moral guidelines Jesus set, but on the other hand they are driving us to despair because we are exposed as failures in their light.

This is when we see that the teacher and the pupil sit in the same boat. I have broken these rules just as often as the participants, if maybe not so openly. That's the reason why we (especially in the last few decades) try to relativise these absolute values. If I as the teacher can not keep to the norms, how can I expect my students to?

If we see Jesus only as the teacher and take his teachings seriously then that will end in a catastrophe because I can never fulfil what he expects of me. Many people don't want to know the Bible, because it is not encouraging and convicts you of your shortcomings.

I was once told after a lecture: "I do want to be a Christian, but I'm scared that I won't make it...". This person is not on his own. He understood something important, namely that in his own strength he won't be able to lead a christian life but he missed the most important aspect of all: He doesn't have to live a christian life out of his own strength, Jesus Christ is with him and only through his strength can and should we be Christians.

The methodist pastor Maxie Dunnam wrote in his book "Alive in Christ"

Being a Christian is not easy, it's not hard either; it's impossible.

Only one human can live the "christian life" – Jesus Christ. He didn't only promise us to be with us until the ends of the earth, but that he would live inside us. If we miss out on this secret (that's what the Bible calls it) then we can't understand Christianity.

If I as a Christian tried to reach God's ideals in my own strength I would be like a rower in the sea. I would try with all my soul and strength to reach God's expectations and end up collapsing at some point. This is what happened to the Christians in Galatia, who started off relying on God's strength and lived through the strength of the Holy Spirit, but later on tried to please God through their own doing. The Apostle Paul didn't beat around the bush when he warned them: "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (Galatians 3,1+3).

When you row a boat the progress you make will be dependant on how much effort you put in. It is a tiring and exhausting movement that will soon get painful and lead to burnout. Additionally, it is only effective on a still sea.

Being a Christian in the way that God laid it out in his word has more similarities to someone sailing a boat. The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians a verse that served as an "eye-opener" to me: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2, 20). In the letter to the Colossians Paul reveals a secret which had been hidden until the resurrection of Jesus, but

now is uncovered for everyone who believes it: “Christ in you, the hope of glory”. (Colossians 1, 27)! The verse I was given at my confirmation shows up a mystery that I wasn’t able to see for many years myself: “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.” (Psalm 37,5 (ESV)). HE will act! That is the wind in my sails. All I have to do is set my sails the right way, be in the right relationship with God and everything else will be done by God. That is the Gospel, the Good News of the Bible. It’s not monotone religion, not following rules, not keeping up rituals or gaining a certain spirituality through techniques, but a loving relationship to the risen Christ. This is what it means to be a Christian!

If you sail, the force that moves you forward comes from the outside. A few years ago I attended a sailing course at the Faakersee and discovered that even though you have to do some active movements they are quite relaxed. You can rest for parts of it and still move forwards. And most importantly you can still move forward on a stormy sea.

Please read these verses again carefully:

- 2. Corinthians 13,5: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?”
- Matthew 28,20: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- Galatians 2,20: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”
- John 15,5: Jesus says: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
- John 14,20: Jesus says: “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”
- 1. Thessalonians 5,24: “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”
- Philippians 1,6: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (I had this verse engraved in my wife Hannelore’s wedding band.)

I’m giving you again the drawing by Neil Anderson from chapter 3 (page). Now compare the two. They are almost identical and yet completely different.

Generally speaking, you can’t fault the drawing in chapter 3; all the main areas in life are covered and we can work at and struggle in all those areas.

But the essence is missing, namely the strength and motivation to meet those values. The strength and the source is Jesus Christ himself, the centre of life.

If someone makes up a rule that cannot be kept by anyone, then that is a bad rule. If we preach a moral that no one can keep to, then, logically, we need to go deeper to set the standard for the future. Because of that reason, we should never preach christian ethics without also preaching Christ’s strength. Doing that would lead to bitterness or legalism.

Thank God Christianity is not just the keeping to certain rules and devotion to a “book faith” (the Bible). Rather, it is living your everyday life through Christ’s strength, who enables us to live in the way that HE had planned from the beginning.

Where I fail, where I fall, I can accept the gift of forgiveness, every day anew. I can live in this world as a free person with my head lifted high. Not because I am such a good person (I am not) but because God himself is with me, lives in me and is always for me.

This short excerpt from a letter from a participant in the summer of 2000 puts it so well.

She wrote: “By now I know a lot of “christian works”, and many earnest Christians strive honestly to put across the right teaching and to come up with the fitting rules for life into the smallest detail. What a difficult undertaking!!! It is no wonder that often the essential part is being overlooked, namely: let Christ light up, his nature, his love towards us, his desires for us, his relationship to us, etc. When people meet with God personally then those individual rules for life will follow by themselves. Our Lord Jesus Christ is very convincing, which is not surprising, as HE is the truth itself.

I experienced this at the Tauernhof: Christ-centered preaching and encouragement to live my life with Jesus and surrendered to HIM. The only fascinating thing about Christianity is CHRIST! If he is missing then being a Christian will soon become a burden. Unfortunately, there are so many burdened Christians. That pains me so much!”

6.2 Perceiving nature

This transition between the lovely, the romantic, the great and the eery, united to a harmonic whole sweeps through the soul with delight, amazement and admiration. Friedrich Simony

Suppose I study art and have to draw a tree. If it was meant to be a really good picture it wouldn't be enough to just look at the tree, but I would have to perceive the tree, I would need to feel it. That is what makes a good painter: When the atmosphere of a scenery “comes across” when you look at it.

Next to my bed is a picture of Jesus in which he holds his hands over the praying Jews at the Wailing Wall. Rolling down his face is a tear because of the pain about the Jews not having recognised him as the Messiah, but at the same time it is an expression of mercy. I realise that no one knows what Jesus' face looks like but the picture is about the emotion that is being conveyed.

Accordingly, it is my deep desire that all our participants not only see the towering mountains, the alpine meadows with the multitude of flowers, or the red rock faces at sunset, but truly perceive them. It has always made me sorrowful when I have tried to show the beauty of creation to a group at the summit cross [commonly found in Austria, Switzerland and Bavaria a cross on the summit of a mountain or hill that marks the top -t/n] and their reaction was: “Yes, quite pretty. Where is the next hut?” It almost hurts to realise that these people only enjoy a fraction of what I am feeling at that moment. They see the same mountains as me but they are hardly taking them in.

It is usually the little things that bring a quality to life. I am realising as I get older that I appreciate the flowers along the path more and more. I can for, instance, see an edelweiss or I can perceive it. The thick covering of hair stops the flower from drying out, as without it the wind would just sweep all the water away. The hairs are light and reflect the sun to protect it from UV rays and act as a sun cream. You can't help but admire such a wise creator that we can see in all the details. You get to

know God in his wisdom, how he can make something so incredibly beautiful in an otherwise unsuitable, even hostile environment.

I am deeply convinced that this “appreciative joy”, as C. S. Lewis calls it, is a gift from God. That means that we will enjoy and love creation in the same measure that we learn to love our Creator. Therefore, every Christian should have a desire to protect the environment.

Salomon says in Ecclesiastes 3, 11-14: “He (God) has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.”

A dear friend of mine, Billy Strachan from Scotland, once told me that he was hardly able to appreciate nature after a difficult childhood. His life changed dramatically when he started to believe in Jesus Christ during his time in the English army. He then was a leader at a bible school in Capernwray Hall in England for many years. One day, as he was travelling with a friend to London by car, he stopped, got out of the car and ran onto a meadow. He knelt down in the grass and called over and over again: “The grass is so green, the grass has such a wonderfully green colour!” His colleague, just like a reader might, thought that he had gone mad. But Billy had for the first time in his life discovered that grass is a beautiful green and was able to rejoice in it.

That is the difference between “seeing” nature and “perceiving” it.

The Psalms are full of the words of men that perceived God in nature. Especially Psalm 104 is a song of worship to the Creator. We often read this Psalm when we sit at the summit.

6.3. Perceiving yourself

It is often a painful yet at the same time the most liberating experience to perceive yourself if you incorporate Jesus Christ. The bitter experiences in life show us a picture of humanity that’s not very appealing. This matches the picture the Bible shows us.

This world is not full of innocent people but full of sinners. If you look for a common denominator between all the cultures, social classes, skin colours and races, this is it: Sin. And the word of God states clearly and simply: “For the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6,23).

Humankind finds this hard to face because on the whole we feel like we are not that bad and we are tempted to say: “But I’m not evil. I don’t deserve death for my decent life. Yes, I want to be corrected, look for the right way and answers to my questions. But I’m not bad, I don’t deserve being called that!”

The problem lies in the definition of the word sin.

“Sin” is not just a moral guide line where you are somewhere on a scale between cannibalist and angel, where you are somewhere between “good” or “bad”.

Sin is about the relationship between man and God and describes the state of separation from God. In a sinful state a person can be evil, unhappy, scared and poor. Or, they can be merciful, kind, happy and rich. The condition is not what decides whether a person is a sinner or not. The deciding factor is

rather whether the person ignores or rejects God, their maker. They live their lives as if they did not have to answer to anyone but themselves. With that the person makes themselves into god.

Most sinners are lovely people, but they live a life separated from God and don't care about the commandments their creator has given them. Who asks God about how to spend their money? When was the last time we asked for God's advice about parenting our children? In its first instance sin is not a valuation of how well or how badly we live our lives, but the description of the state of being separated from God. The "good, middle-class" person often is the one that finds it hardest to admit that state. That's because they compare themselves to the people around them and draw the conclusion that they are a relatively good person and that God (if he exists) should be quite happy with them. If a person perceives themselves as good depends on the people they compare themselves to. For many years it has been my job to be a skiing instructor and compared to most skiers I do very well, so I conclude: "I am a good skier." But if I then go on the slopes with Hans Knaus, who lives locally and competes in the world cup, I realise that I am not as good as I thought I was. The preset benchmark is the determining factor. And God's benchmark for his children is clearly outlined.

When Jesus preached the sermon of the mount, in which he revealed the good news to his listeners, it was a shock to everyone present. It wasn't good news they heard, it was the worst news. The Israelites problem was that over all the years they couldn't keep God's law. You could have scribbled across the whole of the Old Testament: "FAILED!".

Israel failed in every way to keep God's law. The historic books tell us about that failure. The poetic books weep about that failure. The prophetic books judge that failure.

Now, when Jesus came to bring the good news, the Israelites were probably hoping that he would dismiss six of the ten laws so that they would finally be able to reach the set goal. But what they heard instead must have shocked them.

Jesus said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them..."

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment...

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5,17;21+22;27+28).

Up until now they were not allowed to murder someone, now they weren't even allowed to be angry! Up until now it was enough to not commit adultery, but now they weren't even allowed to think about it!

This is the standard that God keeps us humans to. Therefore, we have to admit defeat and concede that we just cannot keep it.

In the eighties I founded the "Adventure Club Dachstein" together with a mountaineering colleague of mine. Our adventure programme also had archery as one of the activities. In archery, when you miss the red dot in the middle you have "sinned". This is apparently a technical term that comes

from the English language: “you sinned”. It does not make a difference how far away from the centre you are, whether it is 1 cm, 10 cm or if you only just hit the target. I think this illustrates the biblical word “sin” very accurately.

If I have missed the middle, if I am not as perfect as God, then I have sinned. It does not make the slightest difference how far away from him we are. Therefore, if that is how we understand sin then we will all have to admit that we are definitely sinners.

That is also why Jesus said in Matthew 5,48: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”. In other words, Jesus is saying: “If anyone is as perfect as my father in heaven they are acceptable and won’t need forgiveness. But if someone has not quite reached the standard in any single point then they can come to me and I will forgive them.”

With Christ-centered Experiential Educational we want to achieve the same thing as Jesus did with the sermon on the mount. A person can get to know themselves as they really are through planned or unplanned extreme situations. Through it they can recognise their profound selfishness and their wickedness. This is often painful but necessary for healing. Only if we recognise that we are ill can we call for help. The worst illness is the one that we don’t recognise, or recognise too late.

I experience this time and time again on our recreational tours. Often just a slightly more challenging mountain trip in rain or snow with a heavy backpack will be enough. It is cold and wet, your back hurts, the blisters are starting to get more painful and you are tired and hungry. You could think of yourself as a patient, grateful person, maybe because your safe and familiar environment at home doesn’t often challenge you. But here everything is different and nothing is in your control. You don’t know when we will get to the hut or whether we will ever get to a hut and the participant in front of you is rubbing you the wrong way with their constant whining.

In the middle of the hostile, wet mountain landscape I gather the group around and quickly explain the surroundings and talk about God’s love and faithfulness; his promise to always be with us in all circumstances and how we are meant to always and everywhere be thankful. At this point I usually get lots of dismissive looks, because now everyone knows that I am a useless leader and should take up a different occupation.

It is always fascinating to watch the reaction of the participants. You get to know people a lot better in how they react than in the way they act. Some retract into their shells in this situation, ignore everyone and everything around them, only do the bare minimum and wait until it’s all over. Others are frustrated about the programme, the weather and the leadership and loudly and angrily make sure everyone knows about their disappointment. Others still try to sort things in a matter-of-fact way and are deeply offended when I won’t tell them if there will be a hut or not. But there are also those that look around and help the more vulnerable participants, encourage them and stay grateful in all the adverse conditions. Very often those are not the physically strong ones.

A few hours later, once we have arrived in the warm hut, I pick up their behaviour and present them afterwards Jesus’ standard.

Matthew 5,41: “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.”

Galatians 6,2: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

In the following debrief many a participant will be honest enough to admit that they were incredibly angry, frustrated, bitter and disappointed and that they only looked after themselves.

The quote of Nietzsche proves to be true here: "A few hours of mountain climbing turn a villain and a saint into two rather equal creatures..." Here you get to know yourself as you really are. The deep abyss of our human nature is sometimes so dark and ugly that you can't entrust it to another person - only God can endure it and help.

The participants have perceived themselves from a new perspective in the extreme situation. At first, it hurt to recognise what negative potential is inside him. The prophet Hosea says about that pain: "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds." (Hosea 6,1).

This means that God allows the pain of humiliating self-knowledge, but only because then healing can begin. King David had to confess his adultery with Bathsheba to God to be able to breathe and live freely again. The sin was forgiven, it had been confessed and the matter was finished. In the Penitential Psalm (Psalm 51,19) he says: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise." (New King James Version).

Whenever someone recognises and confesses that they have not managed to reach God's standard, whenever they admit to themselves that they need God, then we can start to work together constructively. That is when we are on the same plane: We are sinners that are dependent on forgiveness. Peter put it like this: "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble." (1 Peter 5,5). God loves nothing more than to forgive people that ask for forgiveness. This is where I begin to perceive myself. There is a saying in the English language that is rather fitting: "You are not what you think you are, but what you think, you are."

So often there is a deep cry for help behind a mask of security, nonchalance or arrogance. The façade has to be kept up so that I can't get hurt again. But if we have the courage to be honest to God, we can experience freedom.

A few years ago, I got sent a piece of paper with the English title "Who are you?". Unfortunately, I don't know exactly who it is from. Underneath it just said: From "Glad to Be Me" by Dov, Pereta and Elkins.

[This is actually a poem by Charles C Finn called "Please hear what I'm not saying". It is collated in a book called "Glad to be me" by Dov Peretz Elkins. The last line is not in the original poem. -t/n]

Who are you?

Don't be fooled by me.

Don't be fooled by the face I wear

for I wear a mask, a thousand masks,

masks that I'm afraid to take off,

and none of them is me.

*Pretending is an art that's second nature with me,
but don't be fooled,
for God's sake don't be fooled.*

*I give you the impression that I'm secure,
that all is sunny and unruffled with me, within as well as without,
that confidence is my name and coolness my game,
that the water's calm and I'm in command
and that I need no one,
but don't believe me.*

*My surface may seem smooth but my surface is my mask,
ever-varying and ever-concealing.*

Beneath lies no complacency.

Beneath lies confusion, and fear, and aloneness.

But I hide this. I don't want anybody to know it.

I panic at the thought of my weakness exposed.

*That's why I frantically create a mask to hide behind,
a nonchalant sophisticated facade,
to help me pretend,
to shield me from the glance that knows.*

*But such a glance is precisely my salvation, my only hope,
and I know it.*

*That is, if it's followed by acceptance,
if it's followed by love.*

*It's the only thing that can liberate me from myself,
from my own self-built prison walls,
from the barriers I so painstakingly erect.*

*It's the only thing that will assure me
of what I can't assure myself,
that I'm really worth something.*

Who am I, you may wonder?

I am someone you know very well.

For I am every man you meet

and I am every woman you meet.

I am every child you see. I am right in front of you. Please – love me as I am!

6.4 Perceiving your neighbour (the group)

Conducting a conversation with somebody does not necessarily mean that you are perceiving them. We have learnt more or less to behave ourselves and to look at our fellow man when they are talking. But that does not mean that we have listened to them properly. Sometimes that is the case with me and my guests. Of course you ask your guests politely, where they come from, what they do, how many children they have etc. But I have to be honest and admit that if you asked me at the end of many a ski lift ride, I would not be able to tell you what we talked about for the last five minutes.

On the first day of UPward Bound we usually do a little walk to “break in” our shoes and to get to know each other a little. We set the participants the challenge to write down three goals/expectations and three fears/concerns. Then they sit down in pairs to share those goals and fears. Afterwards we gather in a circle and I ask every participant to relate the fears and goals of the other person to me (unless they are very personal).

The surprising and shocking thing with this exercise is this: even though I have listened to the other person for 15 minutes and they have shared their fears and goals with me, I can't remember them. That's not necessarily because I am such a forgetful person but because it doesn't interest me very much. My thoughts are only concerned with one thing, namely me, my own goals and fears.

By its nature, humankind is foremost only interested in himself.

Starting from the moment when I get up in the morning until the last minute of the day when I go back to sleep I only think of one thing: Me! Sometimes this shocks me so much that I am almost repelled by myself. This rotating around yourself becomes obvious even in our “spiritual” prayers. “Lord, help me, bless me, use my gifts, protect my life...”

A dear friend of mine introduced me to this very fitting prayer: “I, my and me, Lord, bless these three!”

It is not wrong to pray for yourself. But if all your prayers repeat these words “me, mine, my, I” you should start to realise something.

If I catch myself doing this, I run to God, ask for his forgiveness and for the freedom to be open and receptive to my neighbour.

One activity that is great at teaching you to perceive your neighbour is orienteering. The participants learn how to use a compass and a map first in the lecture hall and then out in the field. A few days later at the mountain hut every group gets the task to get to five different points on the mountain within three hours. As this task is under a time constraint and as there is a reward for the winners, the different character traits of the participants quickly come to the surface. Some just want to win, others look after the wellbeing of the rest of the group and others still just let the whole thing happen and traipse along uninterested. Because they have to reach every point as a complete group, some interesting group dynamics develop. I often sit on a small mountain with my binoculars so that I can watch the groups. Sometimes I can imagine how God must feel when he looks down on his children. I can see exactly where the checkpoints are and I can see how a group walks past at a distance of about 20 meters five times. I'm itching to jump off the mountain to give them a little shove in the right direction. I can see how some ambitious participants take a short-cut across harder terrain, which some of the weaker participants find so hard that it actually slows the group down. Some of the quieter participants have great ideas, but no one is listening or valuing their opinion. Someone else wants to double-check the bearing with the compass, like we told them to, but there isn't enough time. Often that is how groups never find their checkpoint and return to the starting position after three hours frustrated, angry and sometimes with tears in their eyes. Then we sit down together and ask every individual how they felt, whether they were listened to, whether they tried to contribute etc. Quite a few people will start to understand the feelings, thoughts and motivations of their neighbour. They will apologise, ask for forgiveness, forgive, cry and laugh together. They have perceived one another.

I want to add one thing to this. We are not called to analyse our neighbour, but to love them and live with them. People that always analyse their fellow human beings are pitiable. They constantly try to "expose" things, when there is nothing to expose, except maybe their own insecurities.

Jesus said in John 14,19: "Because I live, you also will live.". Sometimes it seems as if Jesus had said to us: "I live and you shall analyse...". We are meant to perceive our neighbour in love, to love them, take them seriously, but not to analyse them at every turn.

I describe a few group dynamic games we play at Tauernhof in the annexe of this book. These games lend themselves to perceiving myself and my neighbour.

6.5 Perceiving God

Romans 1,20: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

We can perceive God's existence in his creation. This is a big advantage country folk have compared to town folk. In towns, we are surrounded by what humans have created, in the mountains we are surrounded by God's creation.

I don't need to read a scientific book about creation to perceive that a wise creator God made the mountains, lakes and streams. I am totally convinced that any person that wanders open-mindedly

across a flower meadow or an alp pasture can hear an inner voice telling him that creation comes from a wise God with a clever plan.

The apostle Paul said in the quoted verse above, that we are without excuse because we can perceive God in creation (what has been made). However, Paul had said two verses before (Romans 1,18) that the truth is being “suppressed” by people. Humans don’t let the truth emerge, it gets suppressed deliberately and knowingly. That is why the human’s fault is not ignorance but disobedience towards God.

The more we know about the complexity of life, the more the questions about the source of all information comes up. Creation speaks so loudly that more and more astrologists and biologists draw the conclusion that some form of “intelligent force” has to be the source of all this.

People of all times and all classes wrote and write about encountering God in creation. Whether it is at the wuthering sea or in the high mountains, whether in forests or meadows; the presence of God is palpable. David writes about it in Psalm 19,1-4: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world”.

Even if you don’t hear an audible voice we perceive God’s presence in creation. However, this perception of God is limited to his existence. If I go skiing in the mountains in a moonlit night, I can perceive God’s existence and that he has to be mighty and intelligent. But we can’t perceive the complete character of God in nature.

For instance if you contemplate a single snowflake and you realise that in all the billions of snowflakes not one is the same as another, you have to admire his wisdom and creativity. A little while later I saw an avalanche, an accumulation of those beautiful snowflakes, going down the mountain and taking the lives of humans, like it did the lives of three friends of mine a few years ago. And that’s when you ask yourself how this wise God can be merciless and kill people.

Nature lets us know that there is a creator but it doesn’t tell us a lot about his character. The reason for this, is that when sin entered the world it not only destroyed the relationship between human and God, but also influenced the whole of creation. We read in Romans 8,22: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”

If anyone wants to get to know the character of God they need to look at Jesus. We read in Hebrews 1, 1-3: “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, (...). The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, ...”

Jesus is the exact representation of God. If we could see Jesus like people did 2000 years ago, if we could see him speak, act and react then we would be seeing God. That is why we can only know God the father as much as we know Jesus.

At the Tauernhof we do an exercise called “Solo” in which the participants have to stay on their own in a certain place in the mountains for 24 or 48 hours to consciously perceive God in creation and his word. At the end of our time together, somewhere on the mountain we take away the maps and compasses from the participants and assign each person a place where they can spend the next 24

or 48 hours. They have the essentials of a tarpaulin, water, bible and writing utensils. I give a quick lecture about quietness and fasting and the participants exchange expectations and goals for the time ahead. After a few more practical directions each participant is shown their "place" from which they are not allowed to move for the next one to two days. As we are somewhere in the mountains and no one knows exactly where they are, they can't run away. However, everyone does know where the tent of the leaders is so they can get help in case of an emergency. We try to place everyone so that they can't see their neighbour and truly feel alone.

We generally find it hard nowadays to be quiet and alone. We have to force ourselves to be quiet. If we do practice it we find an enormous blessing and discover the meaning of the words in Psalm 46,10: "Be still, and know that I am God".

The simple reason why we suffer so much of not hearing from God is that we are not quiet and therefore can't hear him. For me, these times of quiet within everyday life are a true oasis and there is nothing more exciting than listening to God. To discover, or re-discover this being quiet in God's presence, is a huge concern of ours at UPward Bound. We should say to God, just as young Samuel did: "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1. Samuel 3, 10).

"Solo"-days in our programme are not there to "just be" but to be in God's presence, to listen to him and trust that he speaks to us.

It is interesting to see the different reactions after 48 hours. It is, as if friends met each other again after a long time apart. For many it is the highlight of the programme regarding the implementation in every day life. Time and time again I get letters from participants that were with us five or ten years ago, that say how they found themselves a "solo-place" to be on their own with God.

God talks to us in many ways: through his creation, through his word, through people, through various circumstances and through his holy spirit.

- God's greatness can be seen in the universe and in the stars
- God's wisdom can be seen in flowers, atoms and DNA
- God's mercy can be seen at the cross

The more we gaze at Jesus, in all of these areas, the more beautiful and precious he becomes. We develop a deep gratitude and appreciation for God and other people if I take the time to look at HIM.

Watchman Nee said: *"In the face of such completely selfless love it is actually harder to deny God yourself than it is to yield yourself to him."*

7 Cave stories

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.' Jesus Christ (Matthew 13,34+35)

The story of two cave explorers (the first and the last Adam)

Caving in the Dachstein-cave is part of our Christ-centered experiential education programme here at Tauernhof (see chapter 3). In the absolute darkness of the cave I explain the difference between cave guests (chamois, bears), cave visitors (bats), and cave inhabitants (e.g. the transparent cave scorpion or the small cave spider) to the participants.

There is one more category, namely the cave explorers. They were not born in the cave and they are not made to visit the cave, but they go into it anyway out of their own accord.

In human history there are, biblically and figuratively speaking, two cave explorers: the first Adam, which is the first human (Adam means man); and the second Adam, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5,14; 1. Corinthians 15,45).

The first humans lived in a happy, lively relationship with their Creator. They went for daily walks, played in the garden, enjoyed fellowship with each other and shared their thoughts and feelings with each other. Adam enjoyed the woman God had given him, the beautiful flowers, the animals, sun and the water in the river. One day when he went for a walk on his own he came across a cave. God warned Adam not to get too close to the cave as it would result in destroying that innocent, loving fellowship between God and mankind. In spite of the warning Adam wanted to at least look at the cave entrance and there he met the enemy of God; Satan. He was incredibly beautiful and called himself the "angel of light" (see 2. Corinthians 11,14) and he was gushing about all the delights of the cave. He called God a liar and said that he wanted to keep the best things of life from the humans.

So it was that Adam started to believe Satan more than his Creator God. And together with his wife Eve took a few steps into this mysterious cave. As soon as Adam and Eve were inside the cave something terrible happened: outside; a huge rockfall came off the mountain and blocked the cave entrance. God calls this rockfall "sin". With it the way to the outside was blocked and the fellowship with God was broken.

That's how Adam and Eve became the first cave explorers; those that went in voluntarily but then had no way of getting out again. From now on they were condemned by their own disobedience to live in the cave, away from the sun, warmth, bird song and flowery meadows. Even though the humans were now living in Satan's realm, God never turned his back on them. Time and time again the humans in the cave found clues about God's presence, his providence and love. Every child that was born from that point on was born into the cave and with that became a cave inhabitant (in contrast to the cave explorer).

The humans tried to make the cave as comfortable as possible. I have spent a few weeks in this cave myself, when we explored it. Usually, we would spend three to four days at a time. You find a dry place to sleep, a clean corner to eat in and a crevice is your own private toilet. A friend of mine

brought his own camping chair on which no one else but he was allowed to sit. And that's exactly how it was for the cave inhabitants. There were some who had the dry and sheltered alcoves; that was the high society. Others had to make do with the damp places where a drop of water would fall in their faces every 15 minutes. Every now and then the people found clues about a loving God in the bleak darkness: a box of matches; some fruit; a cup of coffee. But they didn't know the sun.

And then the unbelievable happened.

The second cave explorer voluntarily approached the cave to get into it from the outside. It was hard work to move every single rock from the cave entrance so that it was passable again. Then he crawled inside and finally reached the humans he loved so much. The cave inhabitants were surprised to see him as they weren't sure where he had come from. This cave explorer told them about his home, about the sun, warmth, flowers and birds. He told them about their Creator, the God-Father, who made them so he could be with them. He also told them about the sad incident when the first human had followed Satan into the cave and that that was the reason why they now all lived in that cave. But now he, the second cave explorer, had cleared the entrance and the way to the father was unobstructed and everyone was free to go outside; back into the arms of God.

You might think that all the cave inhabitants immediately started out towards the sun. But most of them were sceptical, because who knew, maybe there was no such thing as the "outside". None of them had ever seen the sun, not to mention birds. No, no, surely this man was a liar and he probably only wanted to lure them away from their dry places so that he could take them instead. That's how they argued and wound each other up until they grabbed this "self-proclaimed cave explorer", filled with fury and pushed him down a pit where he died due to his injuries.

Finally, they were rid of this person who babbled about a better life.

But three days later something unexpected happened. The cave explorer they had killed suddenly came out of the pit. Seemingly without effort he climbed across the hardest overhangs. His presence was so super-natural, so mysterious and at the same time so peaceful. He wasn't angry about the cave inhabitants, instead he once again invited everyone to follow him into fellowship with the father; where light and life were. Many followed him but most of them decided to stay in the cave. Their mistrust was too big. The stories about light, flowers and birds seemed too trivial and his claim that he had cleared the entrance was too simple.

It remains this way still today. This second cave explorer, Jesus Christ, left something similar to a telephone line, leading from the inside of the cave to the entrance. The bible calls this telephone line the Holy Spirit. Everyone that trusts in HIM will find the way to the father and to true life with its help. The way is unobstructed, it only has to be followed in the faith that Jesus was not a liar but that he was telling the truth and he is truth personified.

The words of Jesus in the cave

Jesus Christ said about himself:

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14,6).

“This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.” (John 3,19)

“Jesus ... said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” (John 8,12)

All these words don't need much of an explanation in the darkness, cold and dampness of the cave. Everyone can see, hear and feel it. Every participant knows the sun and is now experiencing the opposite of it, absolute darkness. All of them know that they would be lost without light and that it would only be a matter of days until the last of them would die of hypothermia.

After twelve long and partly damp hours in the sleeping bag every one of them only has one wish: to go back outside, back to warmth and light. Just a few of them sleep well and for most of them it becomes a night they will never forget. Some of them will recognise through this experience how lost we humans are without God and how necessary it is to convince the people in the darkness that there is indeed an “Outside”, where it is light and warm.

Whether people follow the way to the outside is not our responsibility. But it is our duty to tell them about the father and his son, and to tell them that there is an exit.

Life in the cave and life in the sun -earthly life and heavenly life

Of course, many people will shake their heads if you were to tell them about the sun when they had never seen it before.

We all know the sun and know the difference between light and darkness. Suppose a person actually lived in a dark cave from birth. He might know what light is, from matches or a torch but he wouldn't know what the sun is. To see the sun he would have to believe you and follow you to the entrance of the cave. Until he follows you he can discuss and philosophise about the sun. He might come up with some interesting thesis about his idea about what the outside would be like. Maybe after he talked to you about it, he would even write a book about the existence of the sun. But he will never feel the warming influence of the sun unless he follows you to the entrance.

When Jesus talked about the father, many shook their heads at him as well. For Jesus it was the most normal thing to talk about his father, as he had always lived with him and knew and loved him. Just as we live under the sun as a given, Jesus lived with his father as a given. Because we have never seen the father and only have a few clues about him we find it hard to believe in him. So even today we discuss and philosophise about the existence of God, write books and think ourselves mightily clever. But we will only see the father when in faith we follow him to the entrance of the cave. That's why Jesus said in John 3, 12+13: “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. “

For Jesus it was normal that the father talked to him about heaven as that was his home. At Jesus' ascension he went back to his home. He was never a cave inhabitant but a cave explorer. He didn't belong in the cave even though he came to the cave voluntarily out of love towards us.

By the way, you and I are not meant to live a life in the cave. We might have been born into the cave as cave inhabitants (sinners) but we don't have to stay there any longer. The entrance is open and everyone is invited to come into the warmth of the father. One time, when I was holding a lecture in a bible college in England, an old pastor said to me just before I walked to the podium: "Give heaven to these people!" That's what it is about in preaching the gospel: to lead people to the entrance, to show them heaven!

The little light in the darkness

Once I have told this story to our participants in the darkness of the cave, we will pray, sing a few songs and after about an hour of complete darkness will turn on the lights again. This is always a special moment. First, I turn on only my headtorch. There is only one little light and I can see how the participants put their hands in front of their eyes to shield them from the brightness of the light. What a picture. Just one tiny light in complete darkness has the power to blind us all.

Sometimes Christians that have a "normal" job in the world are jealous of us who work at the Tauernhof. They think it must be easier to be a light in the world for us because there are so many lights living together.

But that does not actually correlate to reality. In some christian circles every Christian tries to outshine the others. Everyone seems to think that they need to prove how beautiful and real their light is. But friends, God didn't give us these lights so that we can blind each other, but so that we can bring light into the darkness. The exciting thing about it is that the darker your surroundings are the easier it is to shine. In a godless world it's not hard to be noticed as a Christian. Just do what is right, through Jesus' strength and you will stand out just like a tiny light will illuminate darkness.

I tell these biblical stories in the darkness of the cave. They are not far-fetched parables, they virtually suggest themselves. This shouldn't surprise us, because the same God that inspired the holy scriptures, the Bible, also created the mountains and caves in his almighty power; as well as making humankind in his own likeness. This is why parallels between the different manifestations of God will almost jump out at us, if only we look at them with open eyes. That is exactly what Christ-centered experiential education means to us. Experiential education becomes valuable here where the circle closes in on its Creator. It becomes so valuable that the person actually goes home as a changed person, having found a new foundation for their life which does not only work within the cave, but also carries and nourishes them at home in their everyday life.

8 The Educator

“When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world. As I grew older and wiser, I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country. But it, too, seemed immovable. As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only my family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it. And now, as I lie on my death bed, I suddenly realize: If I had only changed myself first, then by example I would have changed my family. From their inspiration and encouragement, I would then have been able to better my country, and who knows, I may have even changed the world.”

An anglican bishop, written around 1100 anno domini

The word “pedagogue” originates in the Greek and means literally translated “children or boy guide”. The greek word paid-agogos was used to describe the slave that walked the children from the house of the parents to the school and back again. With time, the “children guide” turned into an “overseer of the children” and then into a pedagogue or an educator.

We usually only use this term now to describe people that have studied pedagogics. In this book I use the term for anyone who has some educational responsibility. The principles always stay the same, whether you’re a parent, a teacher at a school or a professional pedagogue.

What makes an educator?

There are three areas within experiential education that make up a good educator. They are also essential within Christ-centered experiential education, however the fourth area is the most crucial to me.

1. Technical abilities (hard skills)

These are the technical instrumental skills like getting the qualification to be a mountain leader, cave leader, skiing instructor etc.

2. Psychological and pedagogical abilities (soft skills)

These are the social pedagogical skills, training to become a psychologist or pedagogue

3. Personality (Meta skills)

Here the qualification is not important but the structure of your personality and strength of character. Especially character traits like communication skills, common sense as well as ethical thinking decide whether you are going to be a good or bad educator. It is important that the participants accept my personality (e.g. giving and receiving feedback)

4. Inner attitude towards God and others (spiritual skills)

The first three areas are certainly important and necessary, but in my experience are not always enough to make a good experiential educator.

The first thing I always look for when we are recruiting a new group leader is whether he loves Jesus Christ and has a genuine concern for other humans.

Does he want to just pass on knowledge and experience success stories, or does he really want to be there for the people in his care and invest in them? Does he want to run the program well or is he ready to love people, to get to know them and take them seriously?

Is he concerned with being popular or does he love others enough to confront them with uncomfortable truths?

As I couldn't find a better term for it, I simply call these attributes "spiritual skills".

Without a genuine concern for people there is no Christ-centered experiential education! If I see the teenagers that are coming to spend a week with us as "annoying brats" then I won't achieve a lot with all my skills. Without genuine love for those people that have been entrusted to me I will not be able to change their lives positively in the long term.

Which leads me back to the foundational truth of the Bible: In myself I do not have this love and I am not able to bring that love across in the 15th ski camp. This is the Christian secret: this love has to be given to us! Romans 5,5: "... because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

In interactions with different people I often feel like the blind man from Bethsaida. This is one of my favourite stories: "They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spat on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?' He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.'

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly." (Mark 8,22-25)

I, too, often see people looking "like trees walking about". I find it hard to see them as God's loved creations and instead see problems and difficulties. They are in my way with all of their problems and stop me from reaching my goal. That's why, just like the blind man, I need to sit myself down in Jesus' presence to be able to see clearly again and to see others through God's eyes, from his perspective, again.

I recommend this quote to every group leader: "If we treat people the way they are, we make them worse than they are. If we treat them as if they were what they potentially could be, then we make them into what they should be."

An educator is a leader that lets himself be led

Originally a pedagogue is someone that leads people home, a leader. If you look up the term leader in a dictionary it simply states: a leader is someone with the skills to lead.

The word of God gives us a particularly beautiful definition of a good leader and educator in John 1,40-42. Here we find Andrew who looked for his brother Simon and "brought him to Jesus". A good educator does not bind the pupil to himself but leads him to his creator and saviour Jesus Christ, the educator par excellence. A good educator does not only lead his pupils to Jesus, but lets himself be led by Jesus. In 2. Chronicles 15,2 we read: "The Lord is with you when you are with him"; and in John 12,26 Jesus says: "where I am, my servant also will be". My primary responsibility as an educator is to stay in the presence of the best educator. The more I consciously let myself be led by him, the better I can lead my pupils. The more I am captivated by Jesus and his spirit, the more his love and mercy will be visible in me and through me.

A while ago, a young man applied for a job as a group leader at Upward Bound. He was a good pupil at a bible college, but he was very headstrong and often disobedient. When I raised this with him he said: "Well, yes, I am just a leading personality and find it hard to follow rules and other people. That

is why I want to be in a leading position.” So I told him what I have had to tell lots of other applicants before: “If you don’t learn to submit yourself, then you can never be a leader!” If a person has not learnt to be subordinate then he won’t be able to lead others in love and mercy.

Jesus was such an outstanding leader because he was dependent on his father in every word and deed. This dependence was evident in his life to such an extent that Jesus could say: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14,9). Jesus was not the father, he was the son. But he was so captivated by his father that the people around him could recognise the character of God in his life.

A contagious Christian, an outstanding educator is the person that you can see a part of Jesus’ character in. A person that is so captivated by Jesus’ love that you can “smell” God in him, as Paul called it in 2. Corinthians 2,15: “For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”. And a few verses later he writes: “You yourselves are our letter, ..., known and read by everyone. “ (2. Corinthians 3,2).

For most people, living Christians are the only Bible that is still being read.

That is the core of Christ-centered experiential education.

9 Final word

A half-truth is a dangerous thing, especially if you have got hold of the wrong half.

Myron F. Boyd

God has talked to mankind ever since he had taken him out of his usual environment. E.g. Abraham moved away from his home in Ur to a foreign land, where he met God. The same principle can be applied today. In our normal surroundings we are unfortunately usually fairly independent and have things under control most of the time. I do not show Jesus to the world through my life, because I manage to get on without him.

However, if a person, especially a young person, is put into a new situation that they have never encountered before, a certain insecurity will arise. I observe in my own life and in that of the participants, two main reactions towards something new.

Either you gather all your courage and say: "How can I cope with this?"

Or, when you are finally at your wit's end and feel desperate enough to admit your helplessness, there is the chance, that you turn to God and say: "How can he cope with this?"

This second reaction is what we want to achieve: to lead participants within the bounds of our Christ-centered Experiential Education programme into situations that are extreme and borderline. Through these planned (and sometimes unplanned) situations we want to teach them to turn to God imminently, directly and personally. One of the Upward Bound mottos is: "If you can't get out anymore, then throw yourself into it!" In regards to God this means that at the point where I can't keep going anymore, I can throw myself into the arms of God and let him be in charge. We want to teach to live in all situations together with our triune God. Whenever we get to our own limits and realise our inability, we can learn to admit that we need help and to ask for it.

God has promised us his help long ago and is at our side. For instance when Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11,28)! That's exactly what we are allowed to do! We can take God by his word when he says: "and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me." (Psalm 50,15).

God does not want us to pray well-formulated prayers, he longs for us to just come to him as we are.

Why do young people leave our programmes actually changed and as new people? Why do we get so many letters from participants and parents that report that suddenly their son is kind, able to listen, cleans his own shoes and is positive towards his siblings? Definitely not because we are such good social workers or experiential educators, or because we have the perfect programme, but because the Lord Jesus himself has intervened in their lives.

Time and time again it is such a privilege and the best reward to step to one side and witness how God changes a person: when a man that constantly has to prove himself suddenly shows humility and honesty; when someone that's tired of life, suddenly can express the feeling of joy; when eyes start to sparkle again and look positively into the future; when a young person grows resilient and willing to serve others. There's nothing more beautiful than witnessing this.

As people we are dependent on God's presence every minute. We might often believe that we are handling things on our own, when really we can't influence the air we're breathing. Fellowship between the Creator and his creation, the dependency of humans on their God and the infinite, insoluble relationship to HIM – that is what we were created for.

Only in this fellowship are we truly human and only here can we be free to be the one that we were in the beginning. On this earth it will only ever be understood in part. But if we let God renew our lives he will start here and now what he will complete in heaven, namely to conform us to the image of his son (Romans 8,29). This is what I wish for myself, my family and every reader.

I want to close with a word from the Bible that I almost ripped out of my Bible a long time ago, because it didn't correspond with the reality I experienced as a Christian.

By now I have framed this verse and highlighted it in neon yellow because I got a taste of it:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5,17)

May the incomprehensible God fill your life with his strength,

That you can lack without becoming bitter,

That you can suffer without breaking apart,

That you can accept defeat without giving up on yourself,

That you can be guilty without despising yourself,

That you can live with unanswered questions without giving up on hope.

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6,24-26)

10 Appendix

Games to support group dynamics (initiatives)

I attach this appendix because you can try out some of the principles of Christ-centered Experiential Education with these games. You don't need mountains or caves, equipment or education for these games. They work for teenagers as well as for adults and you can do them anytime and almost anywhere.

Obviously we need to remember that these games are just that, games, and not a substitute for the earnestness of our behaviour in the mountains or in our everyday lives. Nevertheless, with them you can practice some of the principles like perceiving yourself and others (see chapter 6).

I restricted the games to those that we play at the beginning of a course at Tauernhof. They are great for getting to know each other, to break the ice and for group bonding. The games should be challenging and enjoyable at the same time. It is important that the group leader picks the right games for the group. Almost every game can be adjusted to make it more or less difficult. The ideal size of the group would be 8-12 participants.

So that the games don't just stay games but have some pedagogical worth, some pre-requisites need to be fulfilled. The following aspects need to be understood by the group leader:

10.1 The aim

The aim of a game to support group dynamics could be to get to know the participants, to detect their strengths and weaknesses, or to teach team work and to complement one another. It could be that the participants don't see the idea behind the game at that moment, but that the leader can understand why he is using certain actions.

10.2 The instructor

The instructor should not be taking part in the game but watch the group. This way he can detect who takes the lead automatically, who the participants look to if decisions need to be made, who pulls back from the group and who only joins in because he has to. Character traits that come to the surface here will often repeat themselves throughout all the activities within the programme. If I say, for instance, that the group has to stay silent there is usually one or two people that will behave as if I had never given that instruction. This pattern will also come out when it comes to life-saving instructions while we are in the mountains.

The instructor should:

- Set the problem in a creative way
- Set out clear boundaries and rules
- Keep the group safe
- Always be encouraging
- Give a second chance if they didn't manage it in the first attempt
- Not give all the answers but help the participants to find the solution to the problem themselves

10.3 What the participants are meant to be challenged in

- Patience and communication skills with their peers
- Show courage and face their fears (We are allowed to have fears but the fears are not allowed to have us!)
- Not individual learning, but acting and thinking as a team
- Learn to solve problems together, especially to make a plan of action before the whole group sets off

10.4 A few rules to ensure safety

- The instructor should always keep an eye on the participants, especially if there is rope and height involved
- The whole group should wear long trousers to avoid grazing in case someone falls
- Glasses and watches should be removed so that they won't break, won't get caught and won't hurt anyone else
- The participants should wear trainers or walking boots to make walking easier

10.5 The games

10.5.1 Human knot

The participants form a circle facing each other. Everyone puts their hands into the middle and grab any other hand. They have now formed a human knot that needs to be untangled without letting go of the hands. This exercise can be made more difficult by for instance, blindfolding the participants or asking them not to talk.

Aim: to reduce fear of contact; team work; communication

Number of participants: ideally 8-12

Time: 10-15 minutes

10.5.2 Balance a bucket of water

The participants sit down on the ground in a circle, facing each other. Now they shuffle as close together as possible whilst putting their legs almost vertically into the air. Everyone's heels are touching so that you form a circle with your feet. The instructor then puts a bucket of water on top of the feet. The edge of the bucket should touch every foot. Now the instructor asks the group to remove their left shoe whilst keeping the bucket up on their right feet. After that they have to remove their right shoe. If the bucket hasn't fallen down yet the instructor asks the group to put first the left and then the right shoe back on again.

Aim:	team work; communication; to live with consequences (e.g. when the bucket empties over one or several participants)
Number of participants:	maximum of 4-5
Time:	10-15 minutes
Equipment:	10 litre bucket for every group of 5

10.5.3 Trust fall

The trust fall is one the best-known exercises and it is very effective. You will need a platform about 1-2 metres above the ground (table, wall, patio, tree stump etc) off which each participant will let themselves fall into the hands of their team members.

The higher the platform is, the harder it is to bring yourself to let yourself fall. Despite all of the fun it is important to point out the seriousness of risk of injury with this exercise. The participants stand shoulder to shoulder in 2 rows opposite each other in front of the platform. Everyone crosses over their arms and grasps the hands of the person opposite. They will then practice to soften the impact with their shoulders. The person on the platform stands with their heels at the very edge of the platform, they will have to keep their body rigid and grab their own trousers so as to not scratch the faces of the people catching them. In this position he will then have to let themselves fall backwards. This works best with a team of 10 catching where the strongest people should be in the middle.

Aim:	overcome fears; practice trust; build relationships; faith (=let others do something for me)
Number of participants:	minimum of 9
Time:	20 minutes
Important:	take off glasses and watches, right height of platform for the group

10.5.4 Acid pit

This game encourages creative problem-solving. The instructor will have marked out a stretch of 10 meters on a level bit of lawn. The group has to cross the distance with the help of three planks. The stretch is meant to be a contaminated pit that cannot be touched by anything other than the

planks. If a participant touches the ground they immediately “drop dead” and will need to be recovered by their team members. To do this they will again only be allowed to stand on the planks or the “dead” person. Should this be too easy you can easily add extra tasks, as e.g. blindfolding them or restricting the use of limbs. You could also remove the third plank or shorten the time frame.

This exercise will be timed. Depending on the size of the group the pit will need to be crossed within 10-15 minutes. The participants are not allowed to talk during the exercise.

Aim:	to learn problem-solving strategies; communication without talking; practice leadership
Number of participants:	7-12
Time:	40 minutes
Equipment:	2 ropes, about 10m long, 3 planks, each 30cm long, 15cm wide

10.6 Debrief

The debrief is the most important part in regards to the pedagogical aspect of our programme. You will need to have experience and good intuition to ask the right questions and to get constructive answers from the participants. The best way to learn this is by doing; you will just have to try it. Take a few young people with you to have a nice afternoon. The essential part is the love for the participants and the courage to confront them (which is a part of true love).

The participant should lose all fear that they are being judged put down. Rather they should feel free to express honestly what they think and how they feel.

It is useful to sit or stand in a circle for the debrief. Only one person should be talking at a time, everyone else should listen.

Here are a few examples of questions that can be helpful during a debrief:

- Was it fun?
- Did you reach the goal you set yourself?
- What did you feel whilst solving the problem?
- Why did you decide on that solution?
- Were other suggestions listened to?
- Did anyone have an idea that was ignored?
- Who was the leader (or leaders) and why were they?
- How did they lead?
- What other roles emerged in the group? Who was that? (helper, encourager, the one with the ideas, the one who pulled back, the one who did nothing)
- How was it to be blind or deaf? (communication, dependency)
- What was it like when you “died” or had to go back?
- Who went first, last and why?
- What were the biggest challenges?
- How could you have solved it better

- How does what you just learned correspond with your everyday life, especially in your life as a Christian?

For a general understanding the following questions can be useful:

- Why do we play a game like this?
- How can it help our group?
- What principles can we take away from it?

It is important that the participants understand the principles of the game (if not immediately then maybe later) and that they learn to express these ideas and realisations verbally.

Biblical principles for games to develop group dynamics:

- In regards to team work: 1. Corinthians 12,4-7. 14-19
- In regards to leadership: Mark 10,42-45
- In regards to humility: Philippians 2,1-8
- In regards to cleverness: Proverbs 1,1-9