

# HUNTERS OF THE HARVEST



Restoring  
disconnected  
and dropout  
believers to the  
local church

## BY SHAWN A. AKERS

Louis Posthauer doesn't exactly consider himself an evangelist. Like many, when it comes to witnessing to the lost one-on-one, he's uncomfortable.

Yet with an insatiable hunger to serve the Lord, Posthauer believed God would somehow find a way to use him. After immersing himself in several ministries through his local church, he eventually stepped out into full-time ministry as a volunteer.

In 1989, Posthauer took a leap of faith when God revealed to him a strategy to engage believers who were disconnected from the body of Christ. To reach those he calls "church dropouts," Posthauer began to employ the principles of a ministry that today has become known as "Hunters of the Harvest." Through this ministry, he now trains pastors and ministry leaders to empower their church members to bring the "dechurched" back into the fold. This was a change in direction for Posthauer.

"Over the years, I had been involved in street ministry, and we've brought people into our home to talk to them about Jesus," he says. "Reaching the lost is a tough thing to do, whereas ministering to those who had left the church seemed to be a natural fit for me and my wife, Diana."

Although Hunters of the Harvest started in the late 1980s, it took years for the organization to mature. After a 25-year detour back into the business world as a salesman and marketer in software development, Posthauer found himself unemployed in 2016. Not knowing what the future held, he saw God revive his vision for Hunters of the Harvest with the full support of his pastor, Larry Morris.

In August 2016, Hunters of the Harvest became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, and Posthauer's book, *Hunters of the Harvest: A Biblical Strategy for Restoring Dropout Believers*, was published the same month.

Posthauer encourages pastors and ministry leaders to use the book for an eight-week study in their church's small groups. During the study, pastors show their members how to identify, engage and encourage dropout believers in their circles of influence to take the first step back to the church. The study empowers active church members to engage effectively with dropouts and outlines a spiritual prayer plan to tear down the strongholds that bind dropout believers. It also

provides a strategy for reconnecting each believer to the local church, which has seen a strong decline in attendance in the U.S. in recent years.

### Fighting Decay in the Church

Like Posthauer, Morris has witnessed the decay of the American church. A recent Barna Group study revealed that only three out of 10 Americans attend services regularly. Of the remaining seven who are not in church, four used to attend. That means the number of people who used to attend church but don't anymore is greater than those who do attend now.

"One cannot deny the sobering facts," says Morris, a member of the board of directors for Hunters of the Harvest. "Church attendance has been on the decline for decades, and many who once considered belonging to a local church a vital part of their spiritual development have fallen away. The number of 'dropout believers' is staggering.

"Church leaders must aggressively consider ways to reclaim those who have walked away from the church. Hunters of the Harvest provides church leaders with a theologically sound, practical approach to reaching those who have abandoned their roots in the church. Louis and Diana offer a solid foundation and framework for reaching dropout believers. Any church that desires to reach their community with the gospel needs to consider the biblical directives found in Hunters of the Harvest."

Posthauer says the foundation Scripture for the latter-days' harvest his organization is seeking is found in Jeremiah 16:16: "Now, I will send for many fishermen, says the Lord, and they shall fish for them; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and out of the holes of the rocks."

### Battling the Enemy's Lies

The story of David's pursuit of the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 30 provides insight into Hunters of the Harvest's strategy. The story begins when David returns to his home and finds it ransacked by the Amalekites. The wives and children of both David and his men had been kidnapped, and he and his men fell into great despair.

David regrouped and sought the Lord for encouragement. Upon receiving confirmation from God that he should hunt down his enemy, David and his



Small groups review the study guide in the *Hunters of the Harvest* book to learn how to reach those disconnected from the church.

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men took off in pursuit of the Amalekites. The Israelites surprised and destroyed the enemy, recouping everyone and everything they had lost.

David’s strategy, driven by love for his family and for God, proved effective. Like the Amalekites, the devil has come into the camp of believers—the body of Christ—and taken believing brothers and sisters back into the world, where they are being held captive by strongholds of the enemy, like these:

- “I’ve already been there, done that.”
- “The church is a bunch of hypocrites, so why bother?”
- “The church hurt me before, and they won’t get another chance.”
- “Nature is my church.”
- “I have other priorities.”
- “All I need is Jesus. I don’t need to go to church.”

The last one can be especially dangerous. Like a weak, sickly animal stalked by a pride of lions, the unconnected, dechurched believer can easily fall prey to the enemy. Those who, for one reason or another, have become isolated from the rest of the church body make Satan’s job of deception that much easier.

“Generally speaking, you are not going

to get most dropouts back into church just by asking them,” Posthauer says. “It is the stronghold—the false belief system they have bought into—that is preventing them. This is one of the central elements of *Hunters of the Harvest*’s strategy: to learn how to address strongholds as you begin to engage with dropouts you already know in your own sphere of influence.”

### Winning Those Hurt by Believers

Such was the case with Chuck and Sharee Burbank, whom the Posthauers met through their homeowners’ association. The Burbanks had not only become opponents of organized religion, but they had also become disenchanted with God because of their church experience. The Burbanks felt sold out by members of their church and instead of finding another place to worship, decided to quit going altogether.

“We had been hurt by the church deeply, and for years, we had been very bitter about organized religion and didn’t want to have anything to do with it,” Chuck says.

The actions of their fellow church members left emotional scars Sharee simply couldn’t fathom.

“Not only was I bitter toward organized religion, but I was also bitter with hypocritical Christians who stab each other in the back and shoot their own wounded,” she says. “I was bitter at a supposedly loving God who would allow all of the horrors in the world—the horrors that people can inflict on each other, whether they be small-scale or large-scale—all of the diseases, catastrophes and natural disasters.”

Instead of pressuring the Burbanks or forcing Scripture on them, the Posthauers took time to befriend the couple. Although Posthauer would casually invite the Burbanks to come to church with them now and then, he never pressed the issue. He and Diana continued to pray for the couple daily, and it took more than two years for the Burbanks to agree to visit Living Word Church.

“As we got to know them, we discovered they were Christians, but I liked them anyway,” Sharee says with a grin. “Eventually I poured out our tale of woe about how our church had betrayed and abandoned us and how I didn’t want to have anything to do with God. But instead of beating me over the head with their Bibles or withdrawing from us, which would

have been the easiest thing for them to do, they just continued to love on us.

"They didn't ever hide the fact that they were committed followers of Jesus. Ever so slowly, as we went back to church, I found myself wanting the peace and joy the Posthauers enjoy. Eventually, Jesus brought us back to Himself and healed our spiritual wounds. Today, I'm happy to say that we have that peace and joy in our lives."

Although they moved out of the area nearly three years ago, the Burbanks have continued their close friendship with the Posthauers and now support Hunters of the Harvest financially. They are also planning to start a Hunters of the Harvest small group in their home church.

### Taking Our Neighbors to Church

But what about those dechurched who are willing and wanting to attend services yet have no means to get there? Lu Ann Jerin of Washington, Pennsylvania, is one such individual. Jerin



is physically challenged and can't walk to the nearest church in her area.

She has relied on church members to pick her up and take her to services, but eventually, for one reason or another, her rides to church have dried up. For Jerin, it's disheartening.

"I used to go as much as I could when people would give me a ride, but nowadays it has really cut back, and nobody really wants to pick you up to go to church," says Jerin, who says she would not be able to

ride a bus unless it's equipped with a lift.

Jerin has called churches to get a ride but has had only limited success.

"The person picks me up maybe once or twice but won't do it after that," she says. "I'm not sure if it's because I have crutches and I have lupus."

Posthauer says if someone like Jerin is willing to attend, it's up to the church to make it happen.

"In cases like that, it's definitely the church's responsibility," he says.

The Posthauers' vision is to see Hunters of the Harvest-type ministries active in churches across America.

"We pray that God will raise up a mighty army of hunters of the harvest who will reach every dropout believer, first in America and then across the West," Posthauer says. "It's not a program, it's a divine strategy. It's a spiritual approach to regain what the enemy has stolen—our brothers and sisters in Christ." ■

SHAWN A. AKERS is acquisitions editor for *Creation House* at *Charisma Media*.

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