

Soul Hunter

Evangelist targets outdoorsmen with adventurous gospel message. 

Look around your typical church and you'll notice a common theme: There are more women than men. Evangelist Jay Lowder, founder of Jay Lowder Harvest Ministries based in Wichita Falls, Texas, is working to get more men saved—and attending church—through events that target big, strong (and lost) outdoorsmen. Lowder partners with churches and ministries to host his Adventure Weekend, which offers events for the entire family but includes “manly” activities exclusively for the guys on Saturday night.

“Most of these guys would never in a million years walk through the door of a church unless it was [for] a wedding or a funeral,” says Lowder, who carries some clout among hunters since *ESPN Outdoors* published an article on his turkey-hunting skills. “These guys don’t realize that there is an actual motive behind all this.”

For the men-only event, a church parking lot is transformed into an outdoor exhibition hall, complete with car and motorcycle shows, trophy mounts, golf-equipment demonstrations, sports clinics and hunting classes. Lowder gives away elk-hunting and Canadian fly-fishing trips, expensive rods and reels, trained

highbred

hunting dogs and more. The event concludes with a “beast feast” meal at which Lowder presents the gospel in a low-key way through colorful hunting and fishing lessons.

“I don’t just get up and preach John 3:16. I tell four stories about what I’ve learned while hunting and fishing,” Lowder says. “I use terms like *targets*, *decoys*, *blood trails* and *bad decisions* to explain the gospel to men who aren’t familiar with the church—because those are terms they can understand.”

Indeed, Lowder’s analogies include explaining how deer hunters follow blood trails. Sometimes, even if the hunter makes a perfect hit, the deer runs. To find the deer, the hunter has to follow the blood trail. Lowder ties that back to Christ by explaining he’s on a blood trail that started 2,000 years ago.

Likewise, the evangelist compares looking through the scope of a gun—and how hunters use the cross as a measure to make sure they are on track for the hit—to what Jesus did for all men at the cross. Lowder says typically more than 200 men come to Christ during an Adventure Weekend.

“Churches have become really good at building country clubs where people look like us and dress like us and think like us,” he says. “And we’re also good at getting folks

from
other churches to move to our church because we have better
music or a
bowling alley. But what we haven't done is reach out to
unchurched
people—men who have never heard the gospel.”

Lowder is working to grow the Adventure
Weekend outreach with corporate sponsorships from outdoor
brands such as
Benelli, Beretta, Winchester and Remington. His vision is to
pack civic
centers and build an environment in which men feel comfortable
and
uninhibited so they will lay their *machismo* aside and receive
Jesus.

“At these events, we're seeing men
publicly stand and say they are lost and hurting,” Lowder
says. “A lot
of these guys are very successful, but inside they feel their
life
amounts to nothing. They hear this good news that everything
they have
been looking for can be found at the cross. They recognize
they need
this God-man named Jesus Christ, and they accept Him.”