

This Statistic Should Alarm Every Sincere Believer

No, you did not misread that. To repeat, on average across America, more than 50% of those believers who should be in your church are not.

Allow me to clarify. By dropout, we mean one who professes a Christian belief but has willfully disconnected themselves with any meaningful relationship to the church—the body of Christ.

The Barna Group, which tracks church trends across America, conducted a survey a few years ago that presented startling statistics: For every 10 adult Americans, 7 professed a Christian belief. But of those seven, only three were active in a church. Think of what that means: 4 out of 7 professed believers are no longer active in church.

That is almost 55% of professed Christians. These are dropouts.

This statistic should be alarming and disturbing to every active believer and church pastor. This is a wake-up call about the present-day condition of the Western church.

Picture Christ's Whole Church

Can you imagine what it would be like if all dropouts were in church?! Based on these stats, we are saying that your church would essentially double in size on the average.

Dropout believers who are restored to the church are not pew sitters. Far from it. They are filled with gratitude for God's redeeming grace to them and show it. They give generously. They get involved in serving. They actively look for others who were like themselves and reach out to them. Yes! If your

church were to double in size due to restored dropouts, your “20% who do (and give the) 80%” would become the 60% who do and give 80%. (Do the math.) Your resources—human and financial—have just tripled!

It's Not Just America

Although this trend is tracked closely in America, the stats are even more alarming for Europe, and Central and South America are also experiencing this trend. We refer to these collectively as the Western church. About the only geographical segment of the church not experiencing this trend are the persecuted church countries in the Middle and Far East.

I can confidently say that almost every active believer and certainly every pastor knows some dropouts. Some are friends, some are family members, some are neighbors, some are work associates. The western church has not yet recognized nor understood how to pursue these wandering sheep back to the fold of the church. Yes, we sometimes do think of these and offer prayers, which is good and vital, but it is not enough.

The traditional means of evangelism, which include things like invitations to church, events, concerts and so on, are generally not well received by dropouts. A host of objections generally revolving around “I’ve already been there, done that” preempt a positive response. Why is that?

What About ‘Evangelism’?

Our traditional understanding of evangelism revolves around preaching the gospel to the lost. This is not effective for the dropout believer. You see, they have already heard the gospel. They believe in Jesus—they just don’t care for His people, or they have other excuses. You’re not going to get results by invitations to church, events or preaching the gospel. Their false belief systems have set aside the necessity of church community. These beliefs are strongholds

that have to be brought down if they are to be reconciled to Christ and his body. A one-day or a casual-type interaction with a dropout will change and accomplish nothing.

The only thing that will work to reconcile a dropout back to the community of believers is a consistent, loving relationship with an active believer over time. The lost respond in their heart to the gospel, the love of God for them. Dropouts respond in their heart to the love of Christ for them demonstrated by believers. If you want more insight into this phenomenon, see *Could This Be the Biggest Myth in Evangelism Today?*

What Should We Do?

This brings us to Jesus' parable of the 1 and 99 sheep. Let's be honest. In the natural, sheep are dumb—just plain dumb. Any shepherd can attest to that. Jesus used this analogy to His followers for a reason. Human sheep are often spiritually dumb—some ignorant, some rebellious, some proud, some hurt, some selfish, some distracted, some misguided. Any and all of these are ways that dropout Christians happen.

Now, all you who know one or more of these wandering sheep—what should you do? Well of course, keep praying. And there is a biblical strategy that will give focus to your prayers while developing a relationship of restoration with the dropout regardless of their present relationship or lack of it with you. There is a ministry of restoration of dropout believers that is gaining recognition as a divine strategy for the latter days Western church.

If you are an active believer, you can adopt this restoration strategy as a lifestyle that will enable God to break down strongholds and draw dropouts you know near to Him again. The power of the Holy Spirit is essential in this strategy.

If you are a church that is directed by the Spirit to go after the "1 of 99" (although the truth is actually the "54 of 99")

now!) this strategy can be imparted to the congregants via small groups. Most people aren't evangelists, but they do know dropouts. This is a nonthreatening approach for these to reach out to those they know already. And it works!

What is The Hunters Strategy?

Hunters of the Harvest is specifically focused on dropout believers and is based on a scriptural strategy for identifying, engaging, restoring and reconnecting dropout believers in the latter days.

The foundation Scripture for this latter days' harvest is found in Jeremiah 16:16 (NASB):

"Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen," declares the Lord, "and they will fish for them; and afterwards I shall send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and from every hill, and from the clefts of the rocks."

This latter days' harvest is twofold: the gathering of the lost in the nations (John 21:11), by the "fishermen" and the "net"; and the return and restoration of the dropout believer, by the "hunter" who tracks down each, one by one (Matt. 18:12).

Hunters of the Harvest is a biblically sound and effective approach for restoring dropout believers. The Hunters strategy is based on 1 Samuel 30, when David successfully recovered and restored his wives and family from the Amalekites. It is a highly practical and spiritual approach to regain what the Enemy has stolen—our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Just as God desires the unsaved to turn to the kingdom, he desires the dropout believer to return to the kingdom.

Fishers fish for the lost. Hunters hunt for the dropout believer.

A Divine Strategy

In 1 Samuel 30, a divine strategy is revealed to David to enable him to restore his wives and children from the Amalekites who had kidnapped them from his camp.

The five steps David took:

1. Strengthen yourself in the Lord.
2. Inquire.
3. Pursue.
4. Locate the stronghold.
5. Recover all by warfare.

These steps were not only effective for David—he recovered every last person unharmed—but they are effective today for the church family, the body of Christ. Satan has come into our camp, the body of Christ, and through deceit, has taken our brothers and sisters in Christ back to the world. Now they are being held captive in a stronghold of the enemy.

Where are they?

How can we find them?

What can we do when we find them?

Are we strong enough to recover and restore them?

These are the questions we must answer to understand the strategy for restoration of the dropout believer to the church. *The Hunters of the Harvest* strategy book goes into detail on each of the five steps and describes how they apply to restoring the dropout believer today.

And that's only part of the problem—getting them back in church.

Connection to the Local Church

The other critical part of the problem is connecting every

believer, including dropouts, to the church. Unless a believer is connected to the church, he or she is likely to become a dropout when the storms of life come.

Connection to the church is the key to closing the back door. Connection involves a “threefold cord” that is “not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:12, MEV). These cords of connection are:

- Heart for the pastor and vision of the local church.
- Personal relationships in the local church.
- Area of ministry in the local church.

Without each of these three “cords” of connectivity, *any* believer is likely to become disconnected—a dropout believer—when the storms and issues of life come.

What Are We Waiting for?

So, when are we going to take seriously the imperative to search out our wandering fellow believers and put in a real effort to restore him/her via a real genuine relationship of love/restoration? Here is the crux of the issue: dying to self. Unless we relinquish our overcommitted, self-oriented life and activities, we will never see God’s power to restore the dropout by Him using us. We have lost our first love if this modern-day spiritual tragedy does not move the church to action. We must repent and return. This is the way back to the heart of Jesus.

Believers. arise and shine. Your light has come to the darkness that the dropout lives in! Shine in there!

Churches, be the shepherd who goes after the wanderers—the dropouts—who will radically revitalize your community for God.

Remember: Love never fails.

Louis Posthauer *is the founder of Hunters of the Harvest, a ministry focused on equipping the local church to reach and restore dropout believers. Louis consults with pastors and*

church leaders wishing to tap his expertise to mobilize their congregation with a biblical strategy to reach the dropout believer. He has been actively involved in the local church for 40 years and currently serves as a lay leader at Calvary Community Church in Houston. For more information, visit .