

# Turning Fatherless Boys Into Faithful Men

Last week I watched another shooting unfold in my proverbial backyard, this time at the famous Mall of America, in Bloomington, MN. Thankfully, the incident wasn't a mass shooting with multiple innocents getting mowed down in the corridors of the mall. Instead, it was an apparent [gang-related shooting](#), with one gang member allegedly attempting to pick off a rival at the Nike store.

Reports say that there were no victims. But that doesn't mean that individuals weren't hurt, including those [who are suspected](#) of the crime. They are likely only two of many young men who walk our city streets as both the targets and the targeters of gang-related violence.

Today we are quick to blame guns for the terrible shootings we see on a regular basis. But how many of us take time to think about how those shootings could have been avoided? I'm not talking about creating more gun control—that's an old and tired answer to this problem. I'm talking about recognizing the real problem: these young men doing the shootings—whether they be lone wolves or gang members—usually have something in common: an absent father or a broken family.

[Research shows](#) that “a high percentage of gang members come from father-absent homes.” Boys who grow up without a father are also more likely to get [involved in crime and become absent fathers](#) themselves, thus continuing the cycle in the next generation.

“Yes, yes,” I can hear you say, “we know all that. But it's impossible to break the cycle.” It's hard, definitely. But impossible? No. It requires time and patience and care and effort. And only a few brave souls are willing to do so—like

those at the [Hope Farm School](#) in Stockholm, WI.

I recently heard about this school and began researching it last weekend. A boarding school for young inner-city teen boys, the school combines four hours of daily academics with farm chores. The [school's Instagram page](#) shows the students doing everything from woodworking to harvesting vegetables to taking care of chickens. Even guns are there. Students can take a gun safety training course and then enjoy the fruits of their labor by bringing home the bacon—er, venison—in hunting season.

“We don’t expect our students to walk out of here and be like, ‘I’m gonna become a farmer,’” the school’s executive director, Mitch, [explains in a feature video](#) done by *Alpha News*. “So much of what farming can teach is responsibility, it can teach perseverance. And the beauty of the farm life also is it shows the work from the beginning to the end, and our students have this cool honor of seeing raising a small hog from a piglet all the way to processing the meat and seeing it on the menu.”

Such sentiments are similar to those [uttered by author Whittaker Chambers](#) in *Witness*, recounting to his children the benefits of growing up working alongside one another on their family farm: “you grew in the presence of eternal wonders,” namely, “the wonder of life and the wonder of the universe, the wonder of life within the wonder of the universe.” Such wonders create in children a reverence and awe that, as Chambers wrote, “has died out of the modern world and been replaced by man’s monkeylike amazement at the cleverness of his own inventive brain.”

But the tremendous skills and wonder and awe that farm life teaches aren’t the main perks of Hope Farm School. In the words of the school’s classroom teacher, Libby,

*I think the biggest learning for our students here is in the residential part. They’re learning how to be a healthy*

*family; they're learning how to go to bed at night and get up in the morning. They're learning how to go to school even when they might not feel like they want to go to school. They're learning how to do hard work, but not get too tired or get discouraged. And at the same time, we're like a family, so we have a lot of fun together. Not many teachers get to live with their students and remind them of everything they learned in school and at dinner time and breakfast and lunch, and see them in all aspects of their life, not just at school.*

But the staff at Hope Farm School is quick to point out that their model is not one of isolation. They teach Christian faith, strong principles, and work ethic all through the week and expect students to model what they're learning when they go back to their families on weekends.

This school is small—purposely—and can only take a handful of boys out of the inner city, show them a strong family life and work ethic, and try to break the cycle that afflicts many of the young men who roam our streets and, yes, who commit many of the tragic shootings we see today.

But what if more schools like this sprang up? What if more individuals took the time to really nurture and love and train these young men—to show them a way of life far better than the broken one they are in? Would we not soon see those same young men go out into the world and begin to make a difference, showing others in turn how to live the better way?

It's easy to yell about how we need gun control to stop all the shootings in society. Let's call such a move what it really is: a cheap cop-out. Those who set their sights on gun control deny the deeper problem. The harder, more effective route is taken by those who are willing to pour effort and goodness into the many young men who come from broken homes, breaking the cycle, showing them a better way, and giving them

the life skills that will help them succeed as adults.

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Alpha News via YouTube