

Demetryus' Story

Deep Waters, Grace, and A Faithful God

THE LIGHTS GO DARK in the nearly full auditorium at the LifeChurch.tv, South Oklahoma City campus. On the second row sit Billy and Paty Hargrave and Mike and Chevas Stancliff. Between the two couples is a sixteen-year-old boy drinking an iced tea. The boy, Demetryus,* has the build of a high school football player (which he is) and the easy smile of a teenager with a carefree life (which he isn't). Soon, he sets down his drink, smiles, and says, "I love this song" as the band begins the praise and worship song, *Oceans*. After confessing his desire to sing in the LifeChurch.tv band, Demetryus joins in with the rest of the auditorium, "I will call upon Your name," he sings, "and keep my eyes above the waves. My soul will rest in Your embrace, for I am Yours and You are mine."

A meaningful message for a teenager in foster care.

LAST SPRING, MIKE WAS SEARCHING the LifeChurch.tv website for volunteer opportunities. Stand in the Gap's Life Launch program stood out among the options as something Mike and his wife, Chevas, could do together. After talking to Life Launch OKC Program Manager, Kathy Taylor, Mike was touched by the struggles, including homelessness and unemployment, faced by former foster youth.

"It's... it's crazy," he says, sitting around a table with Demetryus and the rest of his Life Launch team. "My thought process was that if you could pour in and just change one person's life—I know it's not that easy—but if it happens, then their road changes, and their children's road changes, and their children's children's road changes." Mike traces the diverging roads on the table as he talks and Demetryus watches the invisible road map grow. "Then you've changed generations," Mike says, "just by changing one."

Demetryus remembers his team's second meeting. "Billy and Paty presented a gift to me," he says. "It was a book about financial stability and how to be out of debt and manage money. At first, I didn't think much about it, but then they explained why they thought it was important for me. Immediately, when I touched the book, I felt wanted, I felt loved, I felt a sense of safety. I knew that I had a trusting relationship that I'd never really honestly had before."

SINCE THAT SECOND MEETING, the team has fallen into a rhythm. They all meet at LifeChurch.tv for the 5:00 Saturday evening service, which they attend together. Afterwards, they choose a restaurant and, while eating dinner, discuss the sermon they just heard or the book of the Bible they've chosen to read throughout the



"The Stancliffs and Hargraves didn't know each other before Life Launch," says Program Manager, Kathy Taylor, "so Demetryus got to witness people developing healthy relationships from the beginning."

week. The regularity of church and dinner is something everyone on the team looks forward to, but they haven't stopped there. Together, they've been on art walks, to movies, and even helped one of Billy and Paty's children move. (Which, by the way, Demetryus describes as being "a lot of fun.")

The weekly Bible readings have challenged everyone. Paty admits, "I didn't used to read the Bible except once in a while. Now with Demetryus, we challenge him, so we have to rise up."

*Name changed to protect privacy.

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The team's Bible readings made Demetryus "really want to indulge in the Bible and my relationship with God." Although he had attended church regularly before, "it wasn't as important [to me] until I met these people."

One evening at church, the pastor offered an altar call. "Usually," says Mike, "people stay in their chairs and just raise their hands." But Demetryus walked up to the front of the auditorium. "Part of me was a little worried," Mike admits, "I didn't know if he was trying to impress us. But the way he has reached into the Bible—it was real. It was like a new birth in our relationship."



DEMETRYUS ENTERED FOSTER CARE in October 2012. He met his Life Launch team in the spring of 2014 after coming out of what he calls "a dark place."

"I was able to tread through the muddy waters," Demetryus says. "I think [my Life Launch team] will be that tread on the dirt bike [tires] that I need to get over the hill. So far it feels like I'm moving a lot faster."

"We've seen Demetryus grow from our first meeting to our second, third, and fourth meetings," Mike says. "But when we came into this, we knew that we might not see the results we hoped for. To make this a success, I think we as volunteers have to believe that just by showing up consistently we have already won because we have planted a seed in his life. [It's important] to show how healthy relationships and marriages look."

By attending church, reading the Bible, eating dinner, sharing stories and spending time with his Life Launch team, Demetryus has learned something about the character of God. "It is simple," Demetryus says. "God is a faithful God."

IN BETWEEN SATURDAYS, the volunteers on Demetryus' team call him to check in. And each of them admits to praying for him regularly. According to Kathy, "God is blessing Demetryus because the team is continually praying for him and continually showing up."

When she says this, the volunteers are quick to praise Demetryus for the group's successes. Billy says, "Demetryus is willing to put himself out there and put in the effort."

Back at the group foster home where he lives, Demetryus admits that the other youth don't seem comfortable with his growth. "I know that hurt people, hurt

people," he says. "People want to cut my wings because they see that I'm doing good. They'll say, 'This is your home. Don't try to make their home your home.' But it doesn't really bother me because I know that no matter what [my Life Launch team] will be there for me and I

know what I'm trying to do." "By acting the way you do," Mike adds, "—staying positive and avoiding conflicts, you are leading by example and planting seeds too."

RECENTLY, DEMETRYUS' MOTHER has been making steps in her personal life that could lead to her children being placed in foster homes in the city where she lives. Demetryus is excited about the opportunity to repair his relationship with his mother, but disappointed that the move would mean an hour and a half drive from his Life Launch team. This possibility is hard for his team, too. But in spite of the potential distance, Paty says, "I would like this to be a lifelong relationship. I see a lot of potential in Demetryus, a lot of good, good things." And Chevas quickly agrees, "I want him to be around for a long time with us. Our daughters adore him. I know he already has a mother, but I want him to be like the son we will never have."

BACK INSIDE THE AUDITORIUM, Demetryus and his Life Launch team are still singing, "Your grace abounds in deepest waters. Your sovereign hand will be my guide. Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me, You've never failed and You won't start now."