

Cledarius

By Sonny Culp
Board Member

What if we had not moved the event to January would Cledarius have been killed? If I had picked up Cledarius, would his mom and younger sister been killed as well? What is God's purpose amidst all this chaos in Cledarius's life? These and other questions ran thru my mind as I sought to sort it all out. There aren't always pat answers in these type of circumstances.

The fall of 2008 was to be the last time the Restoration Bulldogs played eight-man football. The season had been successful with another state championship. All the players and coaches were invited over to our home in early December to celebrate with a steak dinner. As the date approached we decided to move the event into early January.

One of the players had become special to me due to his fun loving personality as well as his outstanding athleticism. Cledarius is a classic "at risk" urban youth. He had moved in with Coach Coker on a couple of occasions, but was always called back to Mama who seemed to move every few months. His latest residence was an East Lake duplex. So on the day of our event I thought I would go pick up Cledarius after work so that he did not have to travel out to Fairfield to meet with the rest of the team. My wife called that afternoon and was well behind getting ready so I called Cledarius and reminded him to dress sharply since we had a special guest lined up to speak, but I did not mention the idea of picking him up. Later on the team arrived late as they waited for the last arriving team member, Cledarius.

After dinner we enjoyed an excellent word from our guest speaker - a former NFL player. This is when the phone rang and Jenny answered. It was Cledarius's mom asking if the event was over. We had already offered to bring him home to East Lake and she asked that I call her when we got close. I did just that as we headed down Oporto-Madrid at about 10 p.m. I turned onto his street which was pitch black. She met us at the sidewalk and I dropped him off not thinking anything was up.

The next day brought news of a brutal murder in East Lake. Gunmen had been lying in wait as Cledarius's grandmother and great grandmother pulled in from a run to the grocery store. Over 50 rounds were fired into their car and duplex. His grandmother died instantly while his great grandmother was hit eight times and amazingly survived. The murder occurred while Cladarius's mother and sister had driven him to meet the team. While she was out she ran a few errands before returning home to discover the carnage.

At the end of that school year Cledarius gave his life to the Lord in a dramatic and sincere way while on a mission trip to Guatemala. He has moved several times since then and remains "at risk" in several ways. His school work requires the attention of many while his natural athletic skills keep improving. He has a real chance to have a scholarship opportunity by the time he graduates. One thing is certain without Restoration Academy he could possibly be dead.