

Musician Chapman & family discuss how God sustained them through tragedy

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Two months after the tragic accident that claimed the life of his 5-year-old daughter Maria Sue, Steven Curtis Chapman appeared with his wife and three oldest children on CNN's Larry King Live to testify to the home they find in Christ.

Chapman, a Grammy-winning Christian musician, said he deals with the loss of the youngest of his three adopted Chinese daughters "sometimes in intervals of about 15 minutes at a time."

Steven Curtis Chapman and his wife, Mary Beth, discuss the loss of their 5-year-old daughter Maria on CNN's Larry King Live. (BP Photo)

One of the most pressing questions King asked was whether Chapman lost his faith at any point during the ordeal.

At the moment of his daughter's death, Chapman said, he was "crying out to ... my Father."

King wanted to know if Chapman was angry.

"I really wasn't angry at God," he said. "And until you walk through that, I think I'm not sitting here saying, you know, 'I'm so—we're so strong and I made even a choice to do that.' It was just my immediate natural reaction was—I mean I know I heard myself saying a lot, 'God, You can't ask this of me. You can't ask this of my family. This is too much. We can't do this.'"

Chapman was standing on the front porch of his home in Franklin, Tenn., May 21 when he saw his 17-year-old son Will Franklin coming up the driveway in an old SUV. Chapman said he believes it was providential that God allowed him to see that Will was driving uncharacteristically slow and wasn't talking on his cell phone.

Will drove around to the back of the house, and as he was turning the corner, he didn't see his little sister run into his path. Immediately he knew he had hit something, and he stopped, only to find something that would forever change his life.

"Right after the accident, I started just running because I just didn't know what else to do," Will said, referring to what he did after making sure other family members were responding to Maria.

"I just wanted to run and just be away—as far away from the site of the accident as possible—and just started running and was planning on just running as far as I could.

"And then Caleb, not too long after that, just kind of ran and tackled me and just kind of jumped on me," he said of his 18-year-old brother. "... And it was just like, 'You can't leave, you can't leave.' (Caleb) ... was just on top of me saying, 'Everything's going to be OK. We love you. You can't leave.' And ... that was super important."



The Chapmans had adopted Maria and two other girls from China. (BP Photo)

Chapman said his memory of the immediate aftermath is foggy.

"I do remember running around to the back of the house and finding my wife, of course, just in hysterics," he said. "... It was a lot of blood. And I, you know, of course, began ... reminding God of all the great things he had done through history and that he could ... give her life again. He could breathe life back into her."

Maria had been on the playground in the backyard with her two sisters, and she ran toward her brother when she saw him coming in the SUV because she wanted him to lift her onto the monkey bars, Chapman said.

As they waited for medical personnel to arrive, Chapman and his wife performed CPR on Maria to no avail. The girl was flown by helicopter to Vanderbilt Children's Hospital in Nashville, where she was pronounced dead on arrival.

Will and the other children have been meeting with trauma counselors in order to work through their grief, their mother, Mary Beth, said while opening up about her own reaction to losing a child.

"I've been mad. I've been sad," she said. "I've jumped up and down. I've crawled under my bed. I've gone in my closet. You name it; I've done it. And I know that I will never understand, this side of eternity, why Maria, why Will. I have a list of questions in my journal, you know, 'Why?'"

"Your father loves you"

The family agreed that they have never been angry at Will for the accident, and they rallied to show him their support. As Chapman was being driven to the hospital, he stopped in the yard to tell his son, who was doubled over in agony, 'Will Franklin, your father loves you.'

Chapman told about a discovery he made in the hours after the accident

that has provided comfort in the days since.

“Maria had the morning of the accident drawn a picture of a flower and had written a word that she had never written before. She knew how to write her name. That was all I had ever seen, and maybe ‘I love Dad’ or ‘I love Mom,’” Chapman said. “But she had never written any other words.

“And when she first died, Caleb and I, especially, kept saying if we could just see, if we could just have a dream, something, God, we’d believe it. If we could just see something that would tell us that she’s OK.

“And the day after the accident, we went home to get some clothes for the funeral, for the memorial. Sitting on the art table was this little picture that Maria had drawn the morning of the accident. She had drawn a six-petaled flower, and only one petal was colored in. We have six children. Only one is whole now, we believe, in the arms of Jesus.

“She wrote the word S-E-E. She wrote the word see. And she had never written that before. She was saying, ‘See, I’m good. I’m OK.’”

A promise to honor God

Caleb told King that the night Maria died, the family gathered around her body and made an oath that they would honor Maria by honoring God who gave her to them.

“And so the way I’m going to live my life from here on out is not be ashamed of what I’ve been created to do, and that’s just share the gospel, share Maria’s story, and by sharing Maria’s story, I get to share the hope that I found through tragedy,” Caleb said.

The Chapmans took questions from viewers who called and sent e-mails to the show, and one woman asked how she could minister to her close friends who had recently accidentally hit their 2-year-old neighbor with their car.

Chapman said his family has learned a lot about what not to do if they ever “walk into someone else’s journey of grief.”

“I would say be really slow to feel like you have to say anything,” he said. “In fact, the most comforting things that we heard—and that’s probably the best way for me to answer it—is when people would say: ‘You know what, there are no words. I’m not going to try to put words to this. I’m not going to try to say comforting things. I’m just going to sit with you in the grief.’”

A hope in Christ

Chapman said he chose to appear on CNN and on ABC’s *Good Morning America* the day before because he has a hope in Christ to share with people. Just days before Maria’s death, Chapman and his wife were sitting in an airport in China, having worked with some orphans. They got word that part of the country had been rocked by a major earthquake and thousands had died.

“Even as we were in the emergency room grieving the immediate news of Maria going to heaven, I immediately thought of the people of China and I thought, ‘We have a comfort,’” he said on CNN. “We don’t have words. We don’t have an explanation, as we’ve fumbled over trying to explain how, why, all that. But we do have a comfort and we do have a hope.”

Chapman has begun touring again, and he said the tragedy of losing Maria has given him more confidence as he sings.

“I know a lot less about God, but the things I know about God, I know a whole lot more, for sure,” he said.

As a tribute to God’s faithfulness, Chapman wrote another verse to “Yours,” a song that originally appeared on his album “This Moment,” released last year:

"I've walked the valley of death's shadow/So deep and dark that I could barely breathe./

I've had to let go of more than I could bear/And questioned everything that I believe./But still even here in this great darkness/A comfort and hope come breaking through/As I can say in life or death/God, we belong to you."