

Steven Curtis Chapman Opens Up About Family Tragedy

The award-winning singer and his family said their faith in Christ was helping them cope with their grief.



[] Steven Curtis Chapman and his family are speaking out for the first time about the accident that took the life of Chapman's 5-year-old daughter, Maria.

In an interview Wednesday with *Good Morning America* co-host Robin Roberts, the award-winning Christian musician said his family's faith had helped them cope with their loss but that they are "a family with a lot of questions."

"But that's what faith is," Chapman said. "It's living with the questions. That doesn't mean you have the answers. That's exactly what faith is."

Maria Sue Chapman, the youngest of the Chapmans' six children, died May 21 after she ran into the path of the vehicle her 17-year-old brother, Will Franklin, was driving. "She was excited to see him," Mary Beth Chapman said of her daughter, who was the third child she and her husband adopted from China.

As they were leaving for the hospital, Chapman said he yelled to his son, "Will Franklin, your father loves you," though he doesn't fully recall the moment. "I really don't remember this. ... Uncle Dave ... told me, 'You rolled the window down and, just, very loudly, yelled it really ... with as much strength as you could muster and just said, "Will Franklin, your father loves you!"'"

"I don't know if I think somewhere in our hearts maybe [I] had a sense that we may be losing, had already lost, our daughter," Chapman said. "But I really just had a deep concern in my heart that I wouldn't lose two children as a result of this because I knew what Will was struggling with."

Chapman said the family talks a lot about grieving with hope. "What has kept us breathing, kept us alive is that, while we are grieving this process, there is a hope that we have, that we're anchored to in the midst of ... what sometimes seems unbearable."

Mary Beth Chapman commented transparently through tears: "I've said ... somewhat coldly: 'I don't care whose lives are touched by this story and whose lives are changed or what good comes of it. As the heart of a mom, I want Maria back.' ... That's what I want people to know—I want Maria back."

"But ... because of my faith, I know that she's completely whole and completely OK, and I'm going to see her again. [And] as a mom, I have to shift that grief to ... Emily who's getting married and her fiancé, Tanner, and Caleb and his girlfriend, Julia, and Will Franklin. You know, he's my baby boy. And then Shaoey and Stevey, and my grief gets shifted to making sure they're as whole and as healthy as they can be."

"And through that then when people's lives are changed and touched then I can be OK with that. But as ... a mom, I'd like to have Maria back."

For the Chapmans' oldest three children, Emily, Caleb and Will Franklin, healing is coming through counseling, their family and their faith in Christ. Will Franklin said that after the accident he "started running ... running away from the house."

"And I remember Caleb was the first one to run and kind of just jump on me and hold me," he said. "And then Shaoey was right there by him. That meant a ton. ... I didn't really want to be at the house, I just wanted to be away. And I was just freaking out."

His faith has also helped him. "I've gotten ... a stronger faith through all this ... and more faith through all this," he said. "But then there's those days ... that just hit you, and you're just, like, 'Oh, man, this is just awful.' But you just gotta continue to choose to live. And that's the faith that, that

continues to keep me going.”

Caleb said he often wishes he could take the pain from his brother. “You’d rather endure that pain than see your brother, and this case my for real brother, endure that pain,” he said.

Emily described her grief as a winding road. “Sometimes you turn the corner and you’ve got a straightaway and it’s beautiful,” she said. “And then you can turn a corner at the end of that straightaway, and it’s thunderstorms and mountains, and it can be hard—even within the same day.”

Steven Curtis Chapman said his current hit, “Cinderella,” was inspired when he was putting his youngest girls to bed one night and was reminded to appreciate each moment he has with his daughters. Chapman said he wasn’t sure he could ever sing the song again after Maria died, but today it has even more meaning.

“I have to sing it because I have to continue,” he said. “...These chapters that are still being written with my two little girls, Shaohannah and Stevey Joy, and Emily, who’s getting ready to be married—we need to keep living these moments, these living years that we have ... I still need to be engaged in those. And I need to be dancing with my Cinderellas. I’m going to dance with Maria again. I’m absolutely sure of that.”

The Chapmans will appear on *Larry King Live* on Thursday and are to be featured in an upcoming issue of *People* magazine. --
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