

MY HUSBAND SHOT JOHN LENNON



A friend once told me if we put our hope in people, eventually they will disappoint us. But Jesus will never disappoint.

by Gloria Chapman

I met my husband, Mark David Chapman, for the first time in early 1978 in Hawaii. I was a travel agent, and he wanted my help to plan a vacation around the world. While preparing his itinerary, I found Mark to be kind, generous, sweet, thoughtful, and smart.

Just before he left for Tokyo—his first stop—he sent me a big teddy bear that came on a tray with a dozen red roses. The morning Mark was to depart, I felt compelled to go to his house and give him a lei of flowers. I

arrived just as he was putting his suitcase in the trunk of his car. Placing the lei around his neck, I gave Mark a kiss on the cheek.

Since I knew what hotels he would be staying at along the way, I surprised Mark by having letters waiting for him at a few of them. He reciprocated by sending me postcards as he traveled. My love for Mark began and grew with each postcard I received.

When Mark returned to Hawaii on August 20, 1978, I met him at the airport. We started dating the following night.

By the end of that year, Mark and I felt as though we had known each other forever. We talked about everything, including his mental illness and how he had come to Hawaii to kill himself and ended up at a local hospital's psychiatric ward. He explained that he had gotten well enough to get a job at the hospital as a housekeeper. It seemed to me his mental illness was behind him.

I was an unbeliever, and I knew it was important to Mark that I become a Christian. He brought me to Sunday school and church and told me the

gospel, yet he never pressured me. I heard about Jesus Christ at Mark's church and thought, *I don't need a Savior. I'm a good person. I haven't killed anybody or done anything really bad.*

One night Mark took me to a cemetery, pointed to a gravesite, and asked me, "Do you think this is all there is after we die?"

"Oh, no," I replied. "After we die, we come back to live another life, then another, and another, until we reach perfection. Then we go to Nirvana and don't come back anymore."

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

My parents were loving and hardworking, but they provided me with no religious training. The only time we went to church—usually a Buddhist service—was for a wedding or funeral.

As I grew older, I became curious about the spiritual realm and wondered how the world began and operated. I had questions like: Who am I? Why am I here? What's going to happen to me after I die? I sought the truth about life, and I turned to the occult and the supernatural for answers.

I had gone to church with Mark for about five months, the Holy Spirit showed me how wretched a person I truly was. I thought of my active involvement with the occult—like the Ouija board, astrology, Tarot cards, and even an interest in witchcraft—and I thought of the immoral things I had done as a travel agent while on trips far from home. I was amazed that God loved me enough to want me in His family.

I sat alone in my car thinking about everything I had heard at Mark's church, and I said aloud, "God, I don't know if You are real, but if You are, I want to know You." It was a sincere prayer from my heart. God had waited patiently for me to pray it, and He answered right away.

I began to understand the Bible better and to see life differently. At some point I crossed over the line between darkness and light. God transformed my heart and mind; I no longer had any interest in the occult. The old things had passed away. I was a new creation (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

LOVE AND LIES

Mark and I were married June 2, 1979. Soon after, Mark thought he should get a higher-paying job, so he took one as the hospital's printer. But it was a lonely job in the basement, and he had too much time by himself, too much time to think.



Things started to change in our relationship. First, Mark lost his new job at the hospital after a run-in with a nursing supervisor. He got angry with me more easily, and on a couple of occasions, he hurt me physically. He started drinking and sometimes came home drunk.

We still had good times together, but he preferred not to join my friends and me when we had parties. He began to withdraw into himself, and we stopped attending church.

December 8, 1980, was one of the darkest nights of my life. I remember it was Monday. Mark was away on a

trip to New York. I had come home from work, fixed dinner, and was watching "Little House on the Prairie."

On the show, Mary had just found out she'd become blind when suddenly, words ran across the bottom of the screen: "John Lennon has been shot in New York City by a male Caucasian."

I knew it was Mark.

How did I know? Two months earlier, Mark had traveled to New York. He came home scared, telling me that to make a name for himself he had planned to kill the former Beatles star. But he said my love had saved him. He even had me hold the gun, which was still cold from being in the plane's cargo hold.

The only reason I was OK with Mark making another trip was because I had believed him when he said he needed to grow up as an adult and husband and needed time to think about his life. He wanted me to sacrifice being alone for a short time so that we could have a long, happy marriage together. He said he threw the gun into the ocean, and I believed him. But he had lied to me.

Now alone in our apartment, I paced around repeating, "Oh, my God. Oh, my God." At that terrifying moment, I called out to God to comfort me. He heard me crying, and I felt His big, loving arms surround me.

TO STAY OR GO

My life changed dramatically that night. I was now Mrs. Mark David Chapman, the wife of a murderer and not just any murderer but one whose victim was known and loved by millions around the world. The question for me was: Should I stay married to Mark?

At the time Mark and I were married, perhaps because I was a "baby Christian," I was in awe of anything to do with God. When our pastor said we were "standing »

For my safety, Mark had asked me not to be in the courtroom.

before God and these witnesses,” I took our vows very seriously.

We had chosen to say “I will” rather than “I do” because we believe true love requires a decision and a commitment, an act of one’s will. I clearly remember saying that I will love Mark “for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, in sickness, and in health, so long as we both shall live.” Before God, I meant it.

Some well-meaning friends advised me to divorce Mark, and in the beginning, Mark said, for my sake, I should divorce him and get on with my life. I admit that when I got lonely and depressed in that first year of being apart from him, I thought maybe divorce was the right thing to do.

Ultimately, I prayed and searched the Bible to read what God says about divorce. When asked about it, Jesus seemed to indicate that divorce was permissible in the case of unfaithfulness, but on the other hand, He taught us to forgive those who wrong us.

Finally, in the book of Malachi, I read, “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel” (2:16). For me, that settled it, and I closed my Bible. From that point on, I decided it didn’t matter how long Mark was in prison. I would wait for him.

MOVING ON

After the shooting, God knew I needed to get back in church. He prompted Mark’s former pastor, Rev. Charles McGowan, to call me. Even though he was a Presbyterian minister, Rev. McGowan told me to look in the Yellow Pages for Christian and Missionary Alliance churches. He told me Alliance churches are known for their friendliness.

Lo and behold, there was one within walking distance of my parents’ home. I was planning to

move back in with them, so it sounded perfect. I discovered the people at Kailua Community Church really were friendly, and I started to grow as a believer.

Rev. McGowan also gave me a spiritual prescription. He said to write Philippians 4:6–7 on a card and read it aloud three times a day. I followed his instructions, and pretty soon I had the verses memorized. They brought me much peace and comfort.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6–7).

Still, living alone while my husband was thousands of miles away in a prison cell was not easy. I often thought, *If only Mark had stayed in housekeeping and not taken that more stressful job.* And, *What if he hadn’t stopped seeing his psychiatrist?*

LOCKED UP

Mark was given his prison sentence in the summer of 1981. There was no trial because he pleaded guilty. While he was being sentenced, I was in the same building several floors above, in a legal library, waiting for the judge’s decision. For my safety, Mark had asked me not to be in the courtroom.

I was alone for what felt like an eternity. The whole time I sang one song dozens of times: “There’s Something About That Name.” It kept my mind on Jesus.

After Mark’s attorney came in and told me the judge sentenced Mark to a 20-years-to-life prison term, my heart remained at peace. I walked out of that building onto the streets of

Manhattan with no one but God. I was confident that He was with me and would help me.

Soon after his sentencing, Mark was moved from New York City to another prison for processing. Then he was transferred to Attica (New York) Correctional Facility. He was there for 31 years from 1981 to 2012, when he was moved to Wende Correctional Facility in Alden, New York.

In 1982, Mark asked me to move from Hawaii to New York so that I could visit him more often and so we could work on a prison ministry together. He was getting closer to the Lord and had a desire to reach prisoners across the nation with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We created a magazine called *The New Block* and sent it anonymously to U.S. prisoners. It included evangelistic articles, jokes, cartoons, drawings, and word searches. I marvel how God took the experience I had working on my intermediate school newspaper and high school yearbook to help me produce this magazine every month for almost a year.

UPS AND DOWNS

First John 4:4 says, “[T]he one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world,” but Ephesians 4:26–27 says, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

Even though Mark came to Christ when he was 16, he had given the devil many footholds through drugs, anger, rebellion, and even asking Satan to help him commit his crime. He battled demons, and in late 1982 or early 1983, Mark told me to return to Hawaii.

It was a spiritually challenging time for me; I could not understand

what God was doing in having me move twice in less than a year. However, I never doubted God’s existence, and I sensed His presence and comfort when the nights were long and lonely.

I didn’t hear from Mark for more than a year, and three and a half years passed before he allowed me to come visit him again. Especially comforting in those times were these verses:

“Record my lament; list my tears on your scroll—are they not in your record?” (Ps. 56:8).

“For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected,’ says your God” (Isa. 54:5–6).

When Mark and I were married, God took a back seat to Mark. I wasn’t spending any time with God; my spouse always came first. Now with Mark more than 5,000 miles away, my husband was the Lord. I drew near to Him, and as He promised in James 4:8, God drew near to me. He gave me a love for His Word that continues to this day.

God taught me to pray in the power and authority of Jesus’ name for Mark’s complete and permanent deliverance from the enemy. This liberation finally came sometime in 1987 when Mark’s pastor, Ken Babington, and I prayed.

That same year Mark felt as though the Lord had said He would grant us family reunion visits. They’re sometimes called trailer visits. Wives, children, and other family members are allowed to spend about 44 hours with their loved ones in a trailer, or other housing unit, inside the prison.

In April 1987 Mark applied for the program but was denied because of »

his involuntary protective custody status. (Protective custody is a type of imprisonment to protect an inmate from harm, such as from other prisoners. In Mark's case, it is involuntary because he did not request it; the prison administrators did.)

Mark was overjoyed when we were denied—yes, denied—because he knew God was the “super superintendent” and would ultimately be the One to grant us the visits. God worked through the man in charge of Attica's family reunion program, Bob Alexander, who went to the commissioner in Albany, New York, to ask permission for us to have the visits.

Mark and I both wrote letters of appeal and prayed. Finally, more than a year later, we received official word that we were approved. It was a miracle. We enjoyed more than 20 years of annual family reunion visits at Attica. This summer will be my fifth time visiting Mark at Wende.

JESUS IS EVERYTHING

Mark has been walking closely with the Lord for many years now. In 1994 Don Dickerman Ministries, a prison

ministry in Texas, printed Mark's testimony in a brochure. Don also published “The Prisoner's Letter,” a fictional short story Mark wrote about a man who meets Jesus in prison the night before the Crucifixion. For several years Don distributed both brochures in prisons all across the country and in Puerto Rico.

In 2005 Mark felt God wanted us to give these brochures to prison ministries free of charge. Initially my heart wasn't totally into it; I was working full time and pretty involved in church. But then one night during a family reunion visit, God called me to this ministry as well.

Mark and I were sitting on a stoop outside. It was quiet, and I was looking at the big building where most of the prisoners reside. I could hear in the distance guys talking and yelling, and the thought hit me that most of these men's families have given up on them. They don't get any letters; they don't have much hope. I started sobbing, and God gave me His heart for these men.

We estimate that our organization, All About Jesus Ministries, has

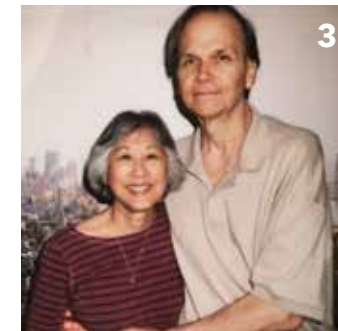
distributed nearly 1 million brochures in the last 12 years to prison ministries around the world. Prison ministries in Africa report inmates coming to Christ through Mark's testimony. We have heard stories of inmates weeping after reading it.

In 2014 we produced a third brochure, “John Lennon's Killer,” based on Mark's seventh parole hearing in 2012. In 2015 we started a follow-up ministry called Call Out to Him Ministries from which inmates can request more information about knowing Jesus.

Mark often says, “All I need is Jesus.” And it's true! Jesus is our healer, our comforter, our sanctification, our hope. He is our everything. ■

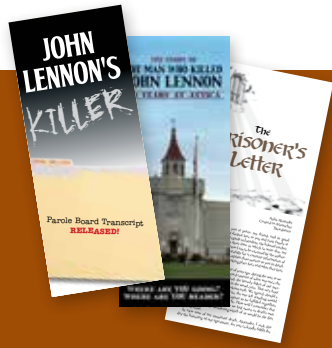


Gloria Chapman has attended Kailua Community (Alliance) Church in Hawaii for 36 years. She is involved with children's ministry and a prayer team and is a member of the church's Missionaries Encouragement Team. Gloria is director for the Hawaii Area Great Commission Women.



To request brochures or learn more about All About Jesus Ministries, e-mail Gloria Chapman at:

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1. Gloria and Mark marched out to “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” at their wedding June 2, 1979.
2. Gloria and Mark honeymooned in Kauai before settling down in Honolulu, Hawaii.
3. Mark and Gloria had their fourth family visit at Wende Correctional Facility on August 17, 2016.

Photos courtesy of Gloria Chapman

BECAUSE OF JESUS' LOVE

What has changed me from “Mr. Psychopath” who just cared about himself and didn't care about people's pain or a wife's pain—meaning Mrs. Lennon or their children, who are now grown? What has changed me from that is being close to God.

The main thing is feeling His love for me for the first time, finally learning He loves me regardless. Even me—convicted, condemned murderer—He loves me. And what happens when you feel His love and it's not from a book, it's not from a tape? When you really experience His love, what happens is you don't

need attention from people. It helps you love others and think about others. And that's what's genuinely happened to me. . . .

I don't have to look to somebody for love or attention or negative attention, or kill people or drink because I don't feel self-esteem. I get that from God. I get that from Jesus.

When that happens, everything changes, and I'm able now to focus outwardly instead of inwardly. I think about somebody else. Like today on my visit, a fellow from Rochester came to see me out of nowhere, and the whole visit was me listening to

him, thinking about him. *What's his life like?*

That's relatively new to me, and it feels great. It's because I feel love for the first time. I really feel love, and it was a great visit. But my point was, because of His love, I'm able to think about somebody else for the first time, and it feels really good. That's His love. It will change you and get you on your feet again in this world, which has finally happened to me.

—Mark David Chapman

Adapted from “John Lennon's Killer,” which includes portions of the official transcript of Mark's seventh parole hearing August 22, 2012.