

# Learn With Manasseh the Lord's Limitless Mercy

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Johnny Cash dealt with a bit of remorse towards the end of his life. Whether you liked him and his music or not you'd have to admit that he knew what remorse meant. Less than a year before he died, he recorded a music video that many music critics have called one of the saddest videos of all time. Cash didn't write the song, but he made it famous with this final video. Most music critics, even those who don't like Cash, praise the video for its deep emotional content. The video was shot in his old home which he had lived in for thirty years but was now becoming dilapidated due to neglect. It was a museum that had long had a sign outside reading "closed to the public." Cash himself was in ill health and couldn't hang around for more than a day or two to record the video. Pictured in the video was an aged Cash, a survivor of heroin addiction and many other regrets. The music video showed him reflecting back on his earlier years when he was a cocky young musician. Smashed photographs and piles of Cash paraphernalia showed his gradual decline in popularity as he aged. The song alluded to all the hurt he had caused himself and others. It also had him singing that he didn't value one bit of his fortune or fame. In the video his wife of 35 years looks on as he sings about his regrets. Three years after the filming she died. Cash followed within four months after her. Within four years the house also burned down. Remorse is a hard feeling to shake. When you've done wrong to many people for many years it isn't something you can just shake off in an instant. Is it ever too late to turn things around?

Today we see that when remorse is accompanied with repentance and faith, it is never too late. We'll be looking at the longest reigning king of ancient Jerusalem, King Manasseh. His regret was no doubt one of the deepest ever felt. He had hurt many. But his remorse was part of the biggest turn-around ever. We learn with Manasseh the limitless mercy of the Lord.

A life of regret can't always be blamed on our circumstances or our family history. Sometimes a person who becomes addicted to drugs, hurts others, turns to sexual immorality, and makes foolish choices with sinful rebellion does so against better knowledge. They grow up in a family of believers with a good example and good instruction in their upbringing. Yet they turn away from their father's instruction and the Word of God. That was the case with Manasseh. His father, Hezekiah was one of the godly kings of Jerusalem. Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, however, did the most evil of all the kings of Jerusalem. Not only did he fail to follow in his father's footsteps, he rebuilt the false places of worship which his father had torn down. He undid all the good his father had worked to accomplish. This is the first thing mentioned by Scripture - Manasseh was so wicked he worked against his own family and upbringing. He worked against better knowledge. This type of rebellion no doubt adds the regret of any who sin. The regret swells up when your sins come back to haunt you and you knew at the time what you did was wrong! Anyone who grew up in a Christian home and stumbled away can testify to the sting of this type of regret. Manasseh felt it.

Manasseh's evil is described as following the evil practices of the nations that the Lord had driven out of the land because they were so wicked. But he was worse! He is described as exceeding their evil. Manasseh wasn't content with ordinary godlessness; he went all out. It says that he worshiped the fertility and sex gods of the surrounding nations. He set up their idols in the temple of the Lord and built altars to them. He also added on the sin of worshipping the stars and giving them honor and serving them. He offered up sacrifices to those gods. We read elsewhere that this included establishing a male prostitute center in the temple of the Lord. It would have included other temple prostitutes with Asherah poles which were sex symbol idols. He even went so far in his practice of idolatry that he hurt his own family. He offered up his own children in fire to false gods. When it says he served all these gods it means he did some awful things for them.

To add to all that it says that he practiced divination, sought omens, consulted the dead with spiritism and witches, and he sought to get advice from demons through necromancers. It was as if Manasseh wouldn't be content to practice idolatry, he wanted to practice every form of worship and loved especially the most sinister and godless he could find.

That's what happens when you reject the Lord. In the end when you turn aside from him your heart will never be content but will chase after every promise of pleasure and power. To turn aside from the Lord is always to turn to demons. The devil will use sex, money, and promise of knowledge and power to get anyone he can to turn aside from the Lord.

But Manasseh's guilt only piled up more. We see that the Lord was sending him prophets to speak to him and warn him. He reigned for fifty-five years. Yet none of those prophets apparently lived long enough to record a single word that remains in our Scriptures. He's the only king of Jerusalem who had prophets speaking to him, but no word left recorded for us. Should that surprise us when we hear in other accounts of Manasseh that the city of Jerusalem was filled with the blood of innocent people from end to end? Manasseh hurt many people.

And he hurt more than faithful prophets and priests and their families as he murdered the innocent. He hurt all of Judah. It says that he led Judah into the sins that he promoted. He is responsible for an entire generation lapsing spiritually into one of the greatest times of darkness for all Israel. Scripture mentions that he led the people of Judah to do more evil than the nations that the Lord had driven out from before them.

So why shouldn't the Lord drive out Manasseh and destroy Israel? Manasseh showed the depth of guilt that the human heart chases after when not chasing after God and his Word. Manasseh hurt more than the people around him, he hurt his own soul and the heart of his Lord. How do you respond when someone insults you? Some in the wild west have taken out guns to shoot those who look at them the wrong way. Some people today still respond with harshness. I imagine you've experienced having someone refuse to talk to you for days on end all because you offended them unintentionally. How about you? What do you do when someone hurts you by saying something rude? How long do you hold it against them? Manasseh offended the Lord for the better part of his 55-year reign! I'd say it was likely around forty years! No other king in all of Israel and Judah ruled for over forty years. Manasseh sinned for forty years straight! How ought to have God responded to such evil?

The Lord sent the commander of the army of Assyria to Israel to bring down proud Manasseh. Evidently, he failed to carry through on a forced tribute or to fulfill his end of an alliance. And the Assyrians came down on him hard. This was God's punishment on his proud, wicked king. The Babylonians tore through the wall of the city and captured Manasseh. They treated him like a captured beast and put a hook in his nose and led him by it. They bound his hands with bronze shackles. And they marched him to confront the king for his failures. Manasseh had offended even the wicked around him. His time had come.

Can you imagine the great remorse he then finally felt? He had killed so many. He had led so many away from the Lord. If only he had served the Lord like his father. If only he had not hurt so many and led so many away from the Lord. If only he had just paid attention to all the prophets sent his way. Now it seemed too late. His time was up. The capture and pain he faced was only a foretaste of the eternal torments of hell destined for all who rebel against the Lord.

There are many like Manasseh who face deep regrets. There are many who have hurt those around them. Against better knowledge they have turned aside from the truth they were brought up to know in the Lord, and they have hit a hard wall of regret. It includes many today: the sexually immoral; the person addicted to pornography; the person struggling to hide the hurt their addiction to alcohol has caused them and others; the man who has been abusive; the woman who has aborted her child; they all know what remorse feels like. Maybe you have felt it too when you've taken that opportunity to sin and sinned against better knowledge. You feel it when you've sinned and harmed others, and your own soul.

But learn with Manasseh the limitless mercy of the Lord. His regret was not despair. It was accompanied with repentance. He didn't just hate the suffering he had to face because of his sin. He hated the sin that had offended his God. He had a new mindset toward sin and towards his life. With a repentant heart and a faith once kindled in his youth, he turned to the Lord, the God of mercy. And he experienced mercy which could hardly be believed!

The Lord allowed him to return to his home and return to his throne. After what was perhaps about forty years of evil, the Lord gave him another fifteen years on the throne. Fifteen years more than any king before him -even David. The Lord is limitless in mercy!

Do you know someone who struggles with remorse and regret? There is no sin or even no span of life that is too great for his mercy. Manasseh may have thought he was at the end of a life of sin. But he was actually at the start of a new life of faith. Have you ever felt despair and guilt over the hurt you've caused someone? With pardon from the Lord you have a new life to live! Repentance means turning away from sin to the mercy of God and a new life of serving him in thanks.

That pardon comes from the one and only king who never had any regrets. He had never done anything wrong, only helped and loved others. He perfectly helped all and never hurt anyone. But so that you and I might never have to hold onto our guilt Jesus came. We deserve to be carted off by the nose by our enemies and to die for every selfish act. But you, me, and even the worst of sinners are forgiven. We experience the limitless mercy of the Lord because he took our punishment. He didn't have a hook in his nose, but nails in his hands. Jesus, the perfect and holy Son of God came to be the king we all need -our redeemer from guilt and shame. Even as he suffered in our place, he never regretted it. He did it out of mercy and love for all the world. He came to be the king that would fight our battle and lead us to perfect peace.

Like Manasseh before us and every sinner we have found pardon from the God of all grace. Our lives are now dedicated to serving him. Manasseh lived to restore worship of the Lord in Judah. He tore down all the idols. He made sure to rebuild and reinstate worship of the Lord in his temple. You can be sure he never again looked up to the stars for knowledge or power, but to the Lord his God. Manasseh's son, unfortunately, did not learn from his father's new life of faith. But after only three years he was followed by his grandson, Josiah, who became the best reformer and worshipper of the Lord in all of Jerusalem's history of ancient kings. The new life that we now live is to live and share his great mercy.

Remorse isn't a bad thing, not if it is accompanied with repentance and faith. It's evident that's what Johnny Cash had too. His music video changed the original lyrics of the song to reference a crown of thorns. Images of Christ crucified were also shown in the video which reached hundreds of millions of people who never even had given Christ a thought in their lives. Scripture is written on his tomb proclaiming Jesus as his redeemer. His life stands to a testament of the limitless mercy of God. So did Manasseh's. So does yours. Your life also stands as a testimony with all sinners made saints by the mercy of God. Learn with Manasseh the limitless mercy of the Lord. And live to make it known.