

## Going the Second Mile

A loud commanding voice rang out. Thirteen men looked to their left side to see what the ruckus was all about. There stood a Roman soldier yelling at a young Jewish man, "Jew carry my pack one mile." They watched and listened as the Jew pleaded with the soldier, "But sir I am on my way to work and my business must be opened before the early morning rush. I don't have time to carry your pack and you are going in the opposite direction." The soldier drew his sword and repeated his orders, "Jew carry my pack." So finally the Jew huffed and puffed and frowned and obeyed his orders. He carried it exactly one mile and dropped it on the ground. Twelve of the thirteen men who watched the episode were astonished. But Jesus was not.

I don't know if this story ever happened but it would not surprise me if it did. Especially knowing the disciples and Jesus teaching techniques - how he often taught a lesson based on what the disciples were seeing at the time.

In Matthew 5:41 Jesus said "Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." (NKJV). The ESV reads "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."

Just about a decade before Jesus came to this earth the Roman senate had passed a law. This law read, "In any conquered province within the Roman Empire, soldiers may compel able bodied men to bear their burden one mile, but no more." This by the way is why Simon of Cyrene had no choice but to obey the Roman soldiers and carry Christ's cross (Matthew 27:32).

I want to discuss three things about going the second mile.

1. Christianity Is a Second Mile Religion.
2. Jesus Lived the Second Mile.
3. Becoming a Second Mile Church.

### 1. Christianity Is a Second Mile Religion

Since the beginning of God's creation many religions have been established. But one thing that Christianity has that none other has is the second mile requirement. Christians are required to live in the second mile. So what is the second mile? Here are a few examples to distinguish between the first and second mile.

- To love ones neighbor is the first mile; to love ones enemy is the second mile.
- To bless those who bless you is the first mile; to bless those who curse you is the second mile.
- To do good to those who do good to you is the first mile; to do good to those who hate you is the second mile.
- Praying for those who pray for you is the first mile; praying for those who spitefully use you is the second mile.
- The Pharisees lived in the first mile; Christians live in the second mile.

What does it mean to go the second mile?

- It means to rise above the instinctive desire to strike back, get even, or settle the score, and to meet evil with good.
- It means to swallow our pride and abandon self-interest. It means to be slow to anger and quick to forgive. It means to live by grace in the face of the unfair.

Let's talk about the first mile for a few minutes.

Many Christians are happy to do the work of the second mile but not of the first mile. The first mile is meeting our basic obligations and responsibilities. The second mile is going above and beyond after we have met our basic responsibilities. You can't skip the first mile and go straight to the second mile and say that you are going the second mile. For example, many are eager and willing to volunteer to help in a Church ministry and do tough jobs to help others, but neglect their own primary responsibilities. This is not honoring God.

Let me give you an example about a church's youth group leader when I met his mother who was a non-Christian. As we chatted, I made a remark about how impressed I was with her son. He was not only bright and had good leadership skills but he was always going the second mile in church. He had great initiative and would be one of the first to volunteer for even mundane jobs. One such job I mentioned was helping to clean the church building (an unpaid job). When I mentioned this to his mother, she snorted and said, "My son is always volunteering to help other people, especially the church. He's always out helping others but he won't lift a finger to help me at home. He will happily go and clean the church but when I ask him to help me clean the house he refuses to help and says he is busy."

I was taken aback and turned to the youth leader (he was 20) and asked him, "Surely your mother is joking." To my horror he turned to me and smiled saying, "No. She's not joking. That's totally true." Then he turned to his mother and said, "As if you need help to clean the house. It's not as if you are working or anything like that. You don't need my help. The church needs my help more than you do". He thought that he was applying the second mile principle. He felt that he was going beyond the call of duty to help where help was not expected. But he could not see and would not accept that it was just as important (actually I would think more important) to fulfill the basic expectations of his mother.

In Mark 7:6-13 Jesus brought this up when he severely condemned some Pharisees for their false piety (they had great second mile sacrifices that went beyond the call of duty) because they ignored their first responsibilities (and in this case it was to honor their parents).

It is wonderful that so many of us are willing to go the second mile for God but let us be careful not to forget that we need to first go the first mile.

It begins at home. We men are so dumb. We do something special for our wives and wonder why they are not impressed that we went the extra mile. It's because all week long we did not even go the first mile. So many couples love one another just enough to be miserable! But that is another sermon.

By the way, I wonder why many of us find it easier to do so called second mile tasks but not the first mile tasks? Two reasons may account for this.

(1) So called second mile tasks tend to be have a shorter time frame.

Which is more difficult? To volunteer in a soup kitchen once or twice a month to feed the poor and disabled, or to provide daily care for a sick loved one for ten years? To spend a week in the mission field working with orphans or to commit to a weekly routine of planning and teaching a Sunday School class for a year?

(2) So called second mile tasks are more glamorous.

When we do something out of the ordinary, it is more interesting for us and people tend to notice and we tend to get more praise.

Yes, Christianity is a second mile religion. But let's not neglect our every day routine first mile responsibilities. We won't argue about what is a first or second mile activity. Jesus made the important point in Matthew 23:23 "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."

## **2. Jesus Lived the Second Mile**

He did this in four ways - His life, His teaching, His praying, and His giving.

**First**, let us look at the life of Christ. What did he do that was living the second mile?

How about eating with Zacchaeus, a known tax collector, a thief in the eyes of the people. This man was hated by the people of the town but Jesus went and ate with him just as he went and ate with the sinners (Luke 19:1-10). Now this may not seem to be living in the second mile but these are sometimes people who others don't care about. These are considered to be the low life of society such as the homeless. Jesus talked to these people and touched their lives. Jesus realized that the ones who are saved already have the gospel and the ones who really needed it are the ones who are lost.

**Second**, Jesus requires us to live in the second mile by the things he taught. Let us look at Matthew 5:38-48. He tells us to turn the other cheek. One of the hardest things known to man is not to retaliate. It is always tempting to hit back or get back some way at those who do us dirty. But Christ tells us to turn the other cheek. Christ says that if someone wants your coat give him your cloak also. He is not saying let people take advantage of you, but he is saying to build relationships with people.

**Third**, Christ lived in the second mile in his prayer life. He fought 40 days and nights with Satan. His fasting, praying, and being tempted give us examples on how to accept adversities. Before He was crucified He prayed until bloody sweat ran down his face.

**Finally**, Jesus went the second mile in His giving. In fact, He went much more than the second mile. He gave His whole self to serve others and then die on the cross for undeserving people such as you and I. He went all the way. He went as far as anyone could go. Jesus said "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:13). Romans 5:8 says that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Because He went the extra mile, you and I can have eternal life.

Jesus lived the second mile. Are we living in the second mile? Are we willing to take the extra steps to become a second mile Christian?

### 3. Becoming a Second Mile Church

Second mile churches are churches that attract people and grow. Second mile churches are well-known in their community for their service. They have a great reputation and are highly regarded (Acts 2:47). When you go the extra mile for others, they will generally go with you.

How can we become a second mile church?

In addition to everything that we already noted in this lesson, we must take these extra mile steps.

- Do more than necessary. My grandparents taught me this value that anything worth doing is worth doing well. The person who gets ahead is the one who does more than necessary and keeps on doing it.
- Do your job and a little extra. The difference will be noticed. Dick Helland, the President and CEO of Capital City Products, set an positive example for many of us whenever we observed him picking up litter off the parking lot or the floor as he walked by. Too many people have a "that's not my job" attitude.
- Give better service than required. The effort will be appreciated. Recall how you felt when you were pleasantly surprised by extraordinary customer service. Think about how you can surprise people with unexpected service.
- Work more than you are paid to do. You will not be paid more until you do.

We are all saved by grace. However, listen to Jesus in Matthew 25:14-29. He expects us to use our talents, skills, abilities, and opportunities.

Why make the effort? The rewards of taking extra mile steps are much greater than your investment since you are motivating yourself and others by your example. The payoff is often difficult to measure in time and money and sometimes is not immediately recognized. The benefits, however, are always worth it.

Most people only do what is expected. Successful people and organizations do a little bit more. For example, the difference between a .250 batting average and .300 is only one more hit every 20 times at bat. It may only take a little more. One degree is all the difference between hot water at 211 degrees and boiling water with the energy of steam at 212 degrees.

You don't have to be twice as good or fast or work twice as hard to go the second mile and become a second mile church. There is no traffic jam on the extra mile! You can make progress and move ahead of the crowd. Enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done. Strive for excellence in all you do. Superior service requires extra mile effort.

Think about it! What does going the second mile mean to you? Why do people generally respond favorably when you go the extra mile for them?

Quotable Quote: The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor. Vince Lombardi, NFL Coach