

Going the Second Mile

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In the first century, Roman law permitted soldiers to compel Jewish citizens to carry their goods for a mile. Once this obligation was fulfilled, the Jews were free to stop, having completed their duty. However, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenged this norm, instructing His followers to "go with him two" if compelled to go one mile (Matthew 5:41). This teaching underscores a principle that extends beyond mere compliance; it is a call to embody a spirit of love, grace, and selflessness that reflects the heart of God.

Understanding the First and Second Mile: The first mile represents the minimum requirement, a legal obligation or basic duty. The second mile, however, is a voluntary act of kindness and love, surpassing what is required. It is in this second mile that the love of God and the teachings of Christ are most clearly demonstrated. Jesus provided three examples in Matthew 5:39-41 to illustrate this principle:

1. **Turning the Other Cheek:** Jesus taught that if someone strikes you on the right cheek, you should turn the other cheek to them as well. In the cultural context of the time, being struck on the right cheek was a severe insult. Retaliation would have been the natural response, but Jesus calls for non-retaliation and humility, showing a willingness to endure even further insult rather than seeking revenge.
2. **Giving More Than What is Asked:** If someone sues you for your tunic, Jesus says to give them your cloak as well. This instruction challenges us to respond to unfair demands with generosity, demonstrating a heart that values peace and goodwill over personal rights.
3. **Going the Extra Mile:** When compelled to go one mile, Jesus commands us to go two. This act transforms a forced obligation into a voluntary expression of love and service, turning an oppressive demand into an opportunity to display the character of Christ.

Going the Second Mile in Our Christian Walk: Jesus' teaching about the second mile is not just about specific actions; it is about a way of life. As Christians, we are called to go beyond the minimum, reflecting God's love and grace in every aspect of our lives. Here are five key areas where we can apply the principle of the second mile:

1. **Bible Study:** The first mile of Bible study involves diligent learning and understanding of God's Word, as instructed in 2 Timothy 2:15. Every Christian is called to study the scriptures, gaining knowledge to live rightly and combat false teachings. However, many Christians fail even to take this first step, content with a superficial understanding of their faith.

The second mile in Bible study involves not just learning for oneself but also teaching others and living out the teachings of the Bible in everyday life. As Paul instructed Timothy, we are to "commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). This involves being an example in conduct, love, and faith, thereby extending the impact of God's Word beyond our personal growth.

2. **Worship and Assembling:** The first mile in worship is regular attendance at church services, as exemplified by the early Christians who gathered on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). However,

merely attending services occasionally or out of obligation misses the deeper purpose of worship.

The second mile in worship means making God's kingdom the priority in our lives, as Jesus taught in Matthew 6:33. It involves actively participating in the life of the church, seeking opportunities to serve, encourage others, and spread the gospel. This commitment reflects a heart that truly seeks to honor God in all things.

3. Dealing with Sin: In dealing with sin, the first mile is acknowledging our sins and seeking forgiveness, as outlined in 1 John 1:9. Every Christian has access to God's grace, and we are encouraged to boldly approach the throne of grace when we sin (Hebrews 4:16).

The second mile, however, involves striving to overcome sin, not just confessing it. Paul's teaching in Romans 6:1-2 reminds us that we should not continue in sin just because grace is available. The second mile is about resisting temptation and living a life that reflects our commitment to righteousness, understanding that ongoing sin can enslave us and separate us from God.

4. Forgiveness: The first mile of forgiveness involves forgiving others when they repent, as instructed by Jesus in Luke 17:3-4. This can be difficult, especially when the offense is severe, but it is a necessary step for every Christian.

The second mile of forgiveness goes even further. Jesus told Peter that we must forgive not just seven times, but "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22), emphasizing that our forgiveness should be limitless, just as God's forgiveness toward us is. This level of forgiveness requires us to reflect the boundless grace of God in our interactions with others, even when it is challenging.

5. Love: The first mile of love is loving those who love us, which is easy and natural (Matthew 5:43). However, Jesus calls us to the second mile, which is loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44-47). This radical love sets Christians apart from the world, demonstrating the transformative power of God's love in our lives.

By going the second mile in these areas, we not only fulfill the commands of Christ but also reflect His character to the world. The second mile is where we move from duty to delight, from obligation to joy, and from mere compliance to genuine love. It is in this second mile that we truly become the light of the world, shining the love of Christ in ways that go beyond what is expected or required.

As we strive to live out the principle of going the second mile, let us remember that we do so not to earn favor with God, but as a response to the love and grace He has already shown us. Our willingness to go the extra mile reflects our desire to glorify God and to be a living example of His love to those around us.