

What does “going the second mile” mean?

Jesus said, "And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two" (Matt. 5:41). Roman soldiers could force citizens of Israel or any foreigner to carry their backpacks for a mile. Here is some important background information concerning this practice:

Cyrus the Great, the king of Persia, invented the postal system to carry letters and documents from one place to another. To make his system work, any courier could force anyone to carry the mail for one mile, but only one mile. The Romans adopted this system for their military to keep their soldiers from getting worn out from carrying heavy backpacks, which weighed about 66 pounds.

Roman soldiers could compel any Jew to carry his backpack for one mile. **Roman roads** had mile markers similar to the mile markers we have today on Interstate highways, so it was easy to know where each mile started and ended. If someone refused to do it, he would be flogged.



The Jews hated the Romans because they were Gentile foreigners running their country and they had to pay taxes to Caesar. Carrying a Roman soldier's heavy backpacks for a mile added to their hatred. The distance was actually two miles because he had to carry it one mile to wherever the soldier was going, and then he had to walk back a mile to get where he was previously.

When a Roman soldier told someone to carry his pack, the Jew would have to drop everything he was doing and go out of his way to obey his order. I'm sure every Roman soldier felt resentment and heard complaining by the

person carrying the pack. Now Jesus says, “Not only do I want you to carry it one mile, I want you to carry it an extra mile.” This was actually four miles (2 miles there and 2 miles back). We don’t carry Roman backpacks anymore, but the principle applies to every area of our lives today—in our relationships, at home, at school, at our jobs—Christ calls us to go the extra mile going above and beyond what is asked of us.

A Roman soldier says to a Christian, “Hey you, carry my pack.” The Christian says, “Yes sir!” And then he joyfully starts walking along with the soldier. After one mile the soldier says, “Okay, you can put it down now.” The believer says, “I would really like to carry it another mile for you.” The shocked soldier asks, “Why would you do that?” The Christian explains, “I am a disciple of Jesus Christ and He told us to do this for you.” The soldier asks, “Who is this Jesus that you follow?”

By carrying the pack an extra mile, it not only showed him the love of God but opened up an opportunity to tell him about Jesus. There’s no telling how many soldiers became Christians during that second mile. I’m sure we would see a lot more people become Christians if we would just go “the extra mile” for them.