

**Date: April 22, 2018**

**Scripture: John 10:11-18**

**Title: LAYING DOWN ONES LIFE**

Every once in a while, there comes a story about someone who gives his or her life for a complete stranger, or at least a casual acquaintance.

In May 2002, the Hartford Currant carried a story of Robert Bonadies, a sky-diving instructor who gave his life while saving one of his students. Cynthia Hyland was tumbling through the air at more than 120 mph and couldn't get herself into the proper position to open her parachute. Neither could she find her parachute rip cord. Luckily, she was flanked by two instructors, Bonadies and another instructor, Jim Olko.

At first, the jump went according to plan. Bonadies and Olko were on either side of Hyland, holding handles on her jumpsuit. They got into the proper position, facing the ground, back arched upward. Hyland practiced touching her rip cord.

The three tipped over and went into a dive. That's when Hyland discovered she couldn't find her ripcord. She didn't know how close she was to the ground. Bonadies knew and he knew that further delays would mean a fatal landing. And so, he stayed with her long enough to pull her ripcord, but too long to pull his own before impact.

Hyland told investigators that Bonadies, known to his friends as "Bobo," died because he took the time to ensure her survival.

Hyland saw none of this actually happening. She was fortunate enough to float to a soft landing in a field. There she gathered up her parachute and began walking back to the airport. Two residents, who live near the farm where Bonadies fell, broke the bad news to her. She broke down crying.

No wonder she cried. Someone sacrificed his life saving hers. We hear about such events from time to time. We call such people who give their lives for others heroes. They deserve our applause.

JESUS SAID, "GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS: TO LAY DOWN ONE'S LIFE FOR ONE'S FRIENDS" (John 15:13). This is the ultimate display of human affection and character, to sacrifice one's life for someone else.

James R. Edwards, in his book, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* tells another true story of a tragic event that occurred in Switzerland back in 1957. Four mountain climbers, two Italians and two Germans, were climbing one of the most challenging mountains in the Swiss Alps. It's known as the Eiger. The North Face of the Eiger is 6,000 feet nearly straight up and is considered one of the most dangerous climbs in the Alps. The two German climbers sought to make the journey alone and were never heard from again. Then, two Italians, exhausted and dying, were marooned on two narrow ledges a thousand feet below the summit.

The normally dependable Swiss Alpine Club wouldn't even attempt rescues in that area. It was simply too dangerous. But, a small group of Swiss climbers, independently decided to launch a private rescue effort, to save those two Italians. These climbers made their way up the mountain by an easier route. Then they cautiously lowered a courageous climber named Alfred Hellepart, from the summit of the Eiger on a slender steel cable only a fraction of an inch thick, down the treacherous North Face into the abyss.

Here's how Hellepart described the rescue in his own words: "As I was lowered down the summit . . . my comrades on top, grew farther and farther distant, until they disappeared from sight. At this moment, I felt an indescribable aloneness. Then for the first time, I peered down the abyss, of the North Face of the Eiger. The terror of the sight robbed me of breath, and a cry escaped involuntarily from me. The blackness of the Face, falling away in almost endless expanse beneath me, made me look with awful longing to the thin cable disappearing above me in the mist. I was a tiny human being dangling in space between heaven and hell. The sole relief from terror, was the human voice on my Walkie-talkie, and my mission to save the climber below."

Hellepart was able to rescue the lone Italian survivor by strapping him to his back in one of the most dramatic rescues in alpine history.

I wonder if Jesus experienced emotions like Hellepart experienced when he hung on the cross . . . when he submitted his will to the will of his Father, and gave his life for us. Did he experience the "indescribable aloneness" or the "terror"? If so, then no wonder he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). And to think, it was all for us.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus lay down his life for us. What a mission of love! It's love that has inspired millions over the past 2,000 years.

**But, please note, that laying down your life for a friend, or even a stranger, is different from laying down your life for sheep.** Yet listen to Jesus' words: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Don't be deceived. What transpired on the cross of Calvary wasn't a transaction between equals. A man laying down his life for dumb and dirty sheep, is different than laying down his life for another human being.

I hope you don't mind being referred to as dumb sheep, because that's who Christ died for, you and me. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life, for the sheep."

Actually it's the sheep who should be insulted. After all, a sheep never killed his neighbor, or passed on the latest juicy gossip. A sheep never deliberately abused its body with drugs or stole from its employer. Sheep don't start rumors. Judged by their own standards, sheep are pretty upright creatures.

As you know, human beings do things that are not too bright. We can sympathize when humans do dumb things out of desperation. **But what about people who do things that are downright evil?**

*Newsweek* magazine recently quoted a 15-year-old young African person from Botswana who said, “The situation in our town is so disgusting that you sometimes ask yourself the question, ‘Why did God create the human being in the first place?’” Human beings obviously have a problem deep in the soul. And it’s a problem far worse than any sheep ever posed.

I was reading about the island nation of Guam. Guam has a problem, a big problem. It’s infested with snakes, between six and twelve thousand of them per square mile! And these slithering reptiles (often 8 feet long or longer) have wiped out 70% of Guam’s native species of birds. The problem, is man-made. Guam once had no snakes, but during World War II the brown tree snake was evidently imported from Australia, New Guinea, and The Solomon Islands as a stowaway in military shipments. Guam now has no way to get rid of the snakes. They have no natural enemy on the island.

The Bible teaches us, that we human beings have always carried a snake problem with us. Everything we touch we infect. We discover a way to harness the wonderful energy of the atom and begin building bombs. We invent the internal combustion engine and pollute the air. We discover a way to extract from nature cures for various ailments, and we end up producing addictive drugs. The Lord of Life gave his life for creatures who do such things, creatures such as you and me. Why in the world did He do it?

**Evidently, God sees something in us, that we don’t see in ourselves.** What a wonderful God, to care for dumb, desperate, sometimes evil creatures like you and me. What an awesome God of mercy and grace! What a wonderful God we worship, to have mercy on human creation, including you and me!

What I hope you see is the divine absurdity of it all. The Lord of all the universe lay down His life for you and me. He laid aside, his regal robes to take up the cross of degradation and death. He laid aside, his crown of glory for a painful crown of thorns, and he did it for us. Can you get your mind around, such an astounding truth? Are you worthy of such an act?

Somehow God found a way to turn dumb sheep into sons and daughters of God. That’s why Christ laid down his life. I don’t fully understand why it had to be done that way, but the result, is staggering all the same.

There was a time when former President Jimmy Carter was working in the Philippines on a house for Habitat for Humanity. The house was near where, the famous Bataan death march of World War II, began. It was a very hot day, and as President Carter and the others worked, their bodies were covered in sweat.

The homeowner, was later asked, what meant the most to him about the project. He replied, one day as he watched, he noticed President Carter working with mortar,

some of his sweat fell into the mix. The homeowner expressed his emotions like this: “I know my walls are blessed, with the sweat of President Carter in them.”

Sweat dropped from Jesus’ body in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he committed himself to the assignment which God gave him, but it was drops of blood that sealed the deal on Golgotha.

A Gallup poll reported once, that 98% of Americans believe in God. That’s incredible. Eighty percent believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But in that same poll, only 40% thought that religion was very important. I find that difficult to believe. People believe that Jesus shed his blood in our behalf, and then we say it’s not really all that important? Sounds like something a dumb sheep would say.

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” I don’t like being compared with sheep. But I know I’m a sinner. I know I am unworthy of having the Lord of Life sacrifice himself in my behalf. Rather, I should be sacrificing myself for him. Today’s not too late to start. By His Grace I will continue to dedicate the rest of my life to him. I hope you will too and you’ll encourage others to do the same. Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.