

A Biblical Perspective on Organ Donation: An Expression of Commitment in Loving a Neighbor

“And God saw everything that (God) had made, and behold, it was very good” Genesis 1:31 NIV

In the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, this verse in Genesis suggests God reviewed and asserted the goodness of creation including the human body. Many know of instances in which a body is capable of healing itself in times of injury or illness such as a stroke in which a part of the brain is sometimes able to compensate or acclimate for damage to the other side of the brain. Our human bodies are amazing, complex, wonderful creations that God pronounced as indeed very good. Our bodies are an integral part of the creation and are a gift of God that allows human participation in the process of creation through bearing children and building relationship with one another in new bonds.

“Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’” Matthew 22:34-40 NIV

Loving your neighbor is highlighted as the second greatest commandment, second only to loving God. It is a dominant theme throughout the Bible (Matthew 19:19, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 5:43, Mark 12:31-33, James 2:8, Galatians 5:14, Luke 10:27, Romans 13:8-9). Loving neighbor as one loves oneself includes elevating the well-being and care of that neighbor to the same degree of a beloved family member, friend, or self. It involves deeply loving beyond the bonds of biological family.

When the question was posed by a Jewish Pharisee to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, “who is my neighbor?” Jesus responded with the story of the Good Samaritan. In the historical context of the story, there was a great degree of strife between Samaritans and Jews. Jesus’ story tells of a man who was attacked, robbed, and left with injuries by the road to die. While others passed him by, a complete stranger and the one most unlikely to stop and help does so – not only tending to his wounds but using his resources to ensure safety and lodging for a good, long-term recovery and to be restored to health.

A multitude of verses in the Bible suggest action by loving responsiveness when seeing someone in need. Loving our neighbor is faithfully expressed in a myriad of ways – responding to physical and spiritual needs through tangible expressions of caring including sharing resources and building relationships. Seeing one’s need involves truly seeing, empathizing, and acting to sustain or restore.

“ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her: ‘Woman, here is your son’ and to the disciple ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” John 19:25-27 NIV

Jesus told stories of breaking down barriers and creating loving connections between people. He demonstrated this in multiple instances in his life. Studies confirm that humans are built for connection in multiple ways, and Jesus modeled the healing power of relationships. Loving a neighbor enough to be willing to donate an organ for the safety, health, and well-being of another is perhaps one of the greatest avenues of expressing love that is available to us. Registering for organ donation illustrates love of neighbor in very tangible action with deep compassion for others. Giving the gift of life through organ donation to someone in a time of extreme trauma who would otherwise succumb to illness or injury is perhaps the ultimate gift of love. Organ donation provides connection, healing and hope.