

DB NLC All Class Retreat 2018

Living Generously

Amanda Weitman

I love talking, thinking and putting into practice generous living. I love it so much I decided to incorporate it into my job so that I could learn more about it and experience it more often. I even started an advisor book club at work focusing on philanthropy so I could keep learning. It makes me happy, it gives me a sense of purpose and I feel fulfilled. There is actually a name for how giving makes you feel. It is called a Helper's High.

I also have found this interesting phenomena around giving. The more I give the more I get. I have a friend at work who has experienced the same thing. The more money we give the more money flows back into our lives. It is really fascinating.

When living a generous life I think we all have the same two choices – we can start from a human standpoint or we can start from a divine standpoint. Both choices are full of love and compassion but one goes further to include the truth of being and as we will discover, to be truly impactful and effective, you need both Truth and Love working together to make a lasting and meaningful difference.

So today we are going to focus on those things that help us start from a divine standpoint and then we are going to cover the different ways we can express generosity in our daily lives to create a positive difference in our world.

Begin Rightly

Mrs. Eddy wrote "To begin rightly is to end rightly." Who in this room is an athlete, a dancer, a musician, a mathematician or a scientist? You all know you have to start with the fundamentals if you want to excel. When I was in elementary school, I would go to the tennis club with my parents. While they played tennis, I would grab an extra racket and start hitting the ball against the

back board. I figured out on my own how to consistently hit the ball right above the line on the wall again and again.

However, when my parents decided it was time for me to have tennis lessons, the tennis pro told me that I had to relearn my swing because it was not fundamentally correct and it would limit my play as I progressed. The fault in my swing was not obvious at my beginner level but as the speed and the strength of my game increased, the faults would become really obvious. So I relearned how to swing my racket and my foot work which allowed me to progress more rapidly.

You will find that this is also true in living a generous life. If you don't start with the right fundamentals, your progress will be halted and your impact will be limited.

So my starting point is God as the origin of all being.

The Bible tells us, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." And She went on to create every good idea. She created man in Her own image; "male and female created She them." And God blessed everything She made and each individual idea She saw as good. But then God stepped back and looked at the big picture of everything She had made and how it worked together and She said that was very good.

Creating every concept as good was not God's defining moment. Creating every good concept that would always work well together 100% of the time with no interruptions, now that was Her defining moment. And God even said so Herself – the whole creation working together is not just good – it is very good.

Why is this important? Mrs. Eddy says "When the illusion of sickness or sin tempts you cling steadfastly to God and His idea." Well, what is His idea? What is God's master plan? His idea is 100% unlimited good harmonizing perfectly 100% of the time with no interruptions. That is what we are supposed to cling to no matter what our limited senses are telling us. This is how you begin aright.

How does this tie into living a generous life? There are many very loving, caring, generous people who are doing their best to alleviate suffering in our world. They start from the standpoint that suffering is real and they are going to do their best to minimize it and hopefully eradicate it. From their standpoint, suffering is something that needs our attention because it is real.

If God's master plan is 100% unlimited good harmonizing perfectly 100% of the time with no interruptions, then suffering cannot be real. It sure seems to be real and people sure seem to be suffering but fundamentally that can't be true if God's master plan is true.

People definitely believe suffering is real but I have read that a belief is just an opinion that has been given loyalty over time. If it goes unchallenged it continues to persist. Those that believe God's master plan is true can challenge any belief unlike good, unlike love, and break that cycle of belief and introduce a new concept.

Stephen Covey tells us "We see the world, not as it is, but as we are – or as we are conditioned to see it." We see what we know. If people have been taught that suffering and disease and lack are possibilities, they won't question them when they appear. If you know God's master plan, you are in the position to see something different than others, you can see what God created which is perfect harmony all of the time. You can help others see this too and set them free to experience a happier and more harmonious life.

Our Sunday School class ran an experiment regarding beginning rightly and ending rightly. The class was asked to leave the building and with the building to their back go right to the first intersection. At that intersection they were to go left until the next intersection and then go left again. Our church property has two buildings. Where they began was going to make a big difference as to where they ended.

They chose to put the Sunday School building to their back and followed the directions however by the time they were on the local high school campus and had run out of intersections they realized that maybe they hadn't started at the right spot. So they course corrected.

This time they started with the church building to their backs and followed the directions and they ended up at the best donut shop in town, Johnny's Donuts. To begin rightly truly is to end rightly. Start with God's master plan of all good.

When beginning rightly, you also need to understand the resources available to you. The understanding that generosity flows from unlimited resources is really important.

Unlimited Generosity

To be generous, you have to understand the substance you are working with. Are you working with limited views or unlimited? Your desire to be generous and how generous will depend on whether you feel like you are sharing limited or unlimited resources.

This past year I realized that I did not really understand the practical aspect of the concepts of Spirit and matter. I got that they were opposites but Spirit you can't see and matter we can see but apparently it isn't real. It seemed like I was living in a dual universe and that did not make sense to me if there is only one Creator. As I was reaching out to God for clarification on this question, the idea came to me to replace the word Spirit with the word unlimited and replace the word matter with the words limit, limited or limitations.

I tested this out with the Scientific Statement of Being to see if these concepts made more sense to me.

"There is no life, truth, intelligence nor substance in limits."

That made sense to me since limits are meant to be broken. And limits only seem real until someone breaks through them and opens the way for others.

Since the first modern day Olympics which were in 1896 no one had run 1 mile faster than 4 minutes. Roger Bannister, a Brit, achieved this feat in 1954 with a time of 3 minutes 59.4 seconds. It took 58 years for someone to run a mile under 4 minutes. Once it happened, it only took 46 days to beat the new record. And in the 2016 Olympic games, all 13 runners in the finals broke the 4 minute mark. This is the new normal. Roger Bannister opened the way for all long distance runners to break down the limit of time.

“All is unlimited Mind and its unlimited manifestation, for God is All-in-all.”

As a reflection of Mind, it totally makes sense that the reflection of unlimited Mind must also be unlimited.

“The Unlimited is immortal Truth; limitations are dying lies.”

“The Unlimited is the real and eternal; limits are the unreal and temporary.”

“The Unlimited is God, and man is His image and likeness. Therefore man is not limited he is unlimited.”

This last statement is what resonated with me the most. It was logical that as God’s image and likeness that if God is unlimited then we have to be unlimited. And that our goal in life, our purpose for being, is to continually break through world imposed and self-imposed limits until we reach that amazing point where we understand, express and experience our unlimited nature.

With this new way of looking at Spirit and matter, I word swap all throughout the lesson now. One day I shared with my daughter, Alexandra, a paraphrase from MBE that “limited thinking or thinking we are limited is the worst foe of the body while unlimited Mind is its best friend.” And what that meant to me was that when you are at camp, going on your adventure and exploration trips, doing

community service work or helping to support the CS community, you are not exercising your bodies to get stronger and faster, you are not overcoming fear with raw courage, you are not helping poor unfortunate people, you are exercising your thinking and breaking through mental limits, challenging self-imposed limits and supporting and cheering others as they break through their mental limits. Basing your generosity on God's unlimited nature will make you far more generous than if you feel like you are giving up limited resources to help others.

In the last year, I have totally gotten into spin classes. One of the instructors always says if something isn't serving us, just let it go. For me, I realized, limits and limitations don't serve me at all and I apparently can just let them go. That seemed way too easy and I wondered why everyone wouldn't just do it, but then I realized that most of us have great conviction and belief that limitations are real, inevitable and insurmountable and it doesn't even occur to us to challenge them. But it just takes one person to challenge a limiting belief and open the way for others. Are you going to be that person? Will this be how you contribute generously to our world?

There is a school of thought, consistent with Christian Science, that affirms that scarcity is the lie and sufficiency is the truth. Paul Zaiter writes, "There is a natural law of abundance which pervades the entire universe, but it will not flow through a doorway of belief in lack and limitation." To truly live a generous life, Paul is telling us that we have to eliminate the belief in lack and limitation to see the natural law of abundance. In your own volunteer work, you may see lack as the pervading issue. Lack of money; lack of a home; lack of health; lack of opportunity; lack of a job; lack of education. You can now challenge this sense of lack as not being insurmountable and you can declare that the natural law is abundance.

Philanthropist and author, Lynne Twist, says there are three toxic myths of the belief in scarcity. The first is that there is not enough. The second is that more is better and the third is that is just the way it is. Lots of very generous people approach their giving based on these lies. To make sure your life of generosity is unimpeded and unlimited, you need to start with the truth that sufficiency is the law.

Lynne goes on to say that when you take a stand for this truth of sufficiency, you work differently. She explains, regarding her conviction that persistent hunger can be eradicated on our planet, “That’s where I stand, and when you take that stand and work from there, you take different actions than you do when you believe that hunger is inevitable and your effort is to try to make it “not so bad”. When you know with certainty that things can be not just different but entirely resolved, you engage in the work in a more fundamental way. You don’t wonder “if”. You determine “how to”. You look at root causes. You make different choices.”

Sounds a lot like prayer and healing, doesn’t it? Taking a stand based on Truth gives you a perfect jumping off point to truly living life generously.

Give Your All

When living a generous life, you may ask yourself, well how much do I actually need to give? The answer is – you give it your all.

When we visited Israel two years ago, we found a small store that sold historical items, one of which was mites that had been dug up in ancient Israel. The mite was the least valuable coin in circulation in Judea. It was worth about 5-6 minutes worth of a daily wage. I looked up the story in the Bible when I got home to remind myself of the story and its meaning. I learned that a widow, especially if she had no sons, would have no visible way to support herself. She would have been the recipient of charity. But in this story, as Jesus is sitting by watching people donate to the different treasury boxes in the temple, he saw her give two mites. She was giving to charity rather than waiting to receive charity.

Jesus pointed out that the widow’s gift was the greatest gift, not because of the monetary value, but because she gave her all. The scribes gave a percentage of their abundance but the widow gave 100% of what she had. The widow’s motivation is suspected to be her love and trust in God whereas the scribes wanted to be seen and known for their giving.

What I learned from this was not a lesson in charitable giving, but of giving my all. I questioned whether I was approaching everything I did with the motivation of loving and trusting God or whether I was approaching opportunities wondering how much or how little I had to give to be noticed? Was I leaving my all in every

activity I am involved in from work to family to friends and community based on my divine nature or was I doing just enough to get by? Was I gauging my efforts based on recognition or money or awards? If I was then I may be limiting my true potential. Was I being receptive and obedient to divine thoughts that are unrestricted by human rules and conditions? I realized I shouldn't let being the top of some list stop me from achieving my all. I needed to keep striving, keep learning, keep excelling with the confidence that I am giving my all based on God's direction. I may end up on the top of a list or may not even make a list, but that doesn't matter as long as I know that I have given my all based on God's conditions and not human conditions just like the widow. My motivation has to be to always give my all and not settle for just good enough.

So, to live a generous life you always need to give your all. Getting by with good enough doesn't meet the standard of living generously.

Redefining Wealth

Another aspect of living a generous life is to see everyone as equals. One of the biggest hurdles to overcome in seeing people equally is monetary status. People generally think their self-worth is tied to their net worth. We think of people as the haves and the have nots. We need to redefine wealth in order to open up the potential to be truly generous.

The word wealth somehow got narrowly focused on material or financial possessions yet the Old English meaning of the word wealth is well being. What if we looked at wealth as well being? How would our perspectives change? What if being healthy, feeling connected, being wise, having purpose, and feeling like we have enough to thrive defined our wealth?

Mary Baker Eddy, wrote that to get the right view of humanity, we need to rethink wealth. She says, "Take away wealth, fame, and social organizations, which weigh not one jot in the balance of God, and we get clearer views of Principle. Break up cliques, level wealth with honesty, let worth be judged according to wisdom, and we get better views of humanity."

If we own lots of things but we feel fearful, anxious, stressed, confused, unloved, and purposeless, then we are not experiencing well being – we are not claiming our true wealth. But what if we replaced those concepts with the fuller meaning of wealth expressed in harmony, wisdom, humor, sufficiency, peace, a sense of belonging and purpose, brotherly love, honor and honesty? The stigma around money, the anger around the “1%”, the disparity between the “haves” and “Have nots” would shrink, if not completely disappear, because we would recognize and value what each individual has to offer. And you, as teenagers, could confidently declare that you are wealthy now and not wait for some time in the future.

If we redefined wealth we would see in each other and in ourselves that everyone has so much to offer our world. This is generosity in action. Let’s recognize, appreciate and see everyone in the world as wealthy. What a difference this would make. The ripple you would make joining together with the ripples caused by others redefining wealth would create a tsunami of change across our globe. Will this be one of the ways that you live generously? Right now, our world seriously needs this perspective.

Compassion

Living a generous life also entails compassion. A lot of focus is put on the value of empathy where you are recognizing and feeling the suffering that others are experiencing. But compassion takes it one more step. Instead of just feeling another’s pain, compassion recognizes the problem and then actively goes to work to alleviate the underlying problem. A good example is the story of the Good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite saw the problem. The Priest crossed the road immediately while the Levite at least checked out the man before crossing the road. But the Samaritan, the Bible tells us, had compassion on the man. He did something about the problem. He bound up his wounds, set him on his beast and took him to an inn and took care of him there until he had to move on. And then he paid the innkeeper to take care of the man until he was well.

The Bible tells us that Jesus looked compassionately on people. He didn't just empathize with others, he did something about it. And his methods went beyond just nursing people back to health. His understanding of God's master plan destroyed misconceptions which resulted in health immediately being restored.

As you are being compassionate, it is important to differentiate between thinking you have super powers over evil as real and seeing evil as having no reality and realizing that is your super power. Jesus had to remind the group of 70 that he sent out on this very same point. He told them in (Luke 10:19-20) "Behold, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." He is basically saying they are invincible in their ability to relieve suffering. But then he says "Notwithstanding in this, rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

Do not forget that your effectiveness in relieving suffering is not that your super power is successfully dodging, blocking and destroying the bullets of lack, greed, sickness and inequality. Your super power is realizing there are no bullets and no evil power to propel the bullets into the world.

The Truth of God's master plan of all good all of the time coupled with compassion is your key to leading a life of generosity. As Mrs. Eddy states in S&H, "Grace and Truth are potent beyond all other means and methods." Make sure you are utilizing both Truth and Love to the best of your ability.

To be your best you have to see the best in others

In a Sentinel article by Eric Bole, he writes "Being the best includes seeing the best in everyone else." I don't think this means ignoring all of the horrible and annoying traits in others and just trying to see the good qualities. Nor does it mean to ignore the suffering of others. I think it means that we have to start with God's master plan and acknowledge that if the origin of everything and everybody is all good 100% of the time then seeing the best in everyone else and ourselves will be a natural occurrence and not an effort in futility.

If we are not seeing the best in everyone then are we willing to rethink our position and start with God's master plan? Are we willing to drop preconceived notions that we have been conditioned to believe about the limited nature of

others and our world and submerge ourselves in Spirit, the unlimited nature of being? And with this new inspired perspective, are we willing to renovate our hearts and minds to allow us to drop false labels and see the best in everyone because that is how they were made?

If we can do that, then seeing the best in others will be natural. And when you do that, they can't help but feel and see that you are treating them differently. You are treating them with respect and love and seeing real value and purpose in them. That will make all the difference in the world to them.

A couple of months ago I met a homeless man outside of a CVS. I said hello and asked what he needed. He said he just needed some money for lunch. I gave him \$5 and then asked how he was going to spend the afternoon and a few other questions. When I started to walk away he thanked me for the money and then he paused. He then said, thanks for being nice to me. I thanked him for being nice to me as well.

This reminds me of a quote by Maya Angelou – “I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Refined not Defined by Experiences

You need to be aware that as you open yourselves up to help others you are going to run into a common belief that we are defined by our experiences. People will be labeled by others and believe the labels to be true which limits their own potential. Labels can include recovering from a substance issue, divorce, a survivor of some physical ailment, homelessness, being unemployed, or being an ex-con, to name a few. It is important for you to realize that those labels mean nothing. When you help others realize that you will reveal doors and windows to opportunities that are naturally theirs to experience but which they did not see. Instead of defining people by their experiences we can help them know that they can be refined if those experiences turn them to God, good, and Her amazing master plan.

16 years ago I was going through a divorce. As with most broken relationships, it was emotionally hard on both sides. I remember one specific day where I literally felt like I was kicked in the stomach as I rehearsed in my head all of the problems I saw in the marriage. Not long after that, I started to not feel well with stomach problems. I was praying but one day I ended up in the emergency room with a medical diagnosis that this could not be fixed and I would have to live with it for the rest of my life. I remember one day laying down on my bed and looking up and asking God, what do you want me to know? And I got a very clear answer. “Stop thinking of yourself as a survivor.” And the follow up message was, “I have been taking care of you all along, when was there an opportunity for you to survive something?” That was it. My healing occurred at that moment in time and I have never experienced another symptom of this medically diagnosed issue. I let go of being defined by an experience and through my reliance on Christian Science my thought was spiritually refined and things were better than when the whole situation started.

If you can help others see that they don’t have to be defined by circumstances and that they can be refined by turning to God’s master plan, you will have given them one of the best gifts ever. This is truly living generously.

We just covered the important fundamentals of living a generous life which are to begin rightly, the unlimited nature of generosity, giving your all, redefining wealth, seeing the best in everyone and being refined not defined by our experiences by learning more about God. Now we will cover five aspects of how you can put this all into action.

In the charitable world, it is often discussed that people who give of their time, talent and treasure are called philanthropists. With the likes of Bill and Melinda Gates, Warren Buffet and Mark Zuckerberg, it seems like the word philanthropist has been hijacked to mean giving large amounts of money. But truly, the word philanthropy simply means the love of humankind. So whether you are giving of your time, talent or treasure, you are a philanthropist. I like to add two more aspects of being a philanthropist to the list, ties and thought. Ties relate to the influence and connections you have. Thought, to me, is the most fundamental aspect of philanthropy because how can you truly love humankind if you are accepting a false view of it?

When you start on your philanthropic journey, it is important to know what you stand for. That requires understanding what your top core values are. These are concepts that are so important to you that circumstances would not alter your position. Once you have identified your core values, you can then choose your vision statement. This is your aspirational message of where you want to go. And from there you can put together a mission statement which is your road map or flight plan for getting to your ultimate goal.

I don't know what Jesus' top 5 core values were, but if I were to guess, they might include faith, grace, wisdom, honor and humility. His vision statement might have something to do with God's creation like seeing and experiencing 100% unlimited good harmonizing perfectly 100% of the time with no interruptions. His mission, is mentioned in S&H. Mrs. Eddy writes "His mission was to reveal the Science of celestial being, to prove what God is and what He does for man."

As you think about living generously, what do you stand for? What are your top 5 core values? What is your vision statement and what is your mission statement?

Okay, let's focus on the five T's that we mentioned earlier as part of expressing a generous life. Time, Talent, Treasure, Ties and Thought.

Time

You all know about giving of your time since it ties into your Congressional Award. How many in the room have achieved one of the certificate levels already? How many have achieved one of the medal levels already? And for the newer classes, how many of you are excited to start volunteering?

Give yourselves a round of applause for your desire to help and the hours you have put in to make our world a better place! We all thank you and appreciate you for your service.

You all understand the gift of time. So let's move on to the gift of Talent.

Talent

When you give your gift of talent you are helping others with a skill that they need. All of you in this room have probably helped someone in your family that is older than you with technology or social media. Am I correct? This is giving of your talent.

My favorite story of giving of talent happened last summer. My daughter, Alex, had an internship with a non-profit organization called Miracle Messages. They use social media to connect the homeless with family and friends.

Every Monday night, the staff would go to a homeless shelter in San Francisco. One evening, Alexandra was talking to a homeless man named Eddie. He was sharing with Alexandra that he had not seen his son for 29 years and the last time he had seen him he was 3 months old. Eddie used to play in the NBA for the San Antonio Spurs. Alexandra asked if he would like to reconnect with his son and he said yes. Eddie shared that his son was named Darren O'Leary, that he was 29 years old and that the last time he saw Darren he lived in Cork, Ireland.

The next day, Alexandra started searching social media. As she searched, she found a lot of Darren O'Leary's and she started looking at everyone that had a picture. Darren is half African American and half Irish so Alexandra could rule out all of the Caucasian Darren O'Learys. She came across a photo of a young man who looked just like Eddie. This Darren still lived in Cork and Alexandra reached out to him and let him know that a gentleman named Eddie McCloud wanted to connect with him and would he be interested in hearing from him. Darren was very interested and sent a video message to Alexandra to share with Eddie. The next Monday night Alexandra went back to the shelter in hopes to find Eddie and share the good news. Alexandra found him and shared the video with him. Alexandra asked if Eddie wanted to send a message back to Darren because Darren very much wanted to hear from his dad. Eddie said yes and Alexandra filmed him and sent it to Darren. The next week, Miracle Messages had set up a live Facebook interview via Skype of Eddie and Darren who would be speaking to each other for the very first time. Miracle Messages got ESPN to film the interview as well since Eddie was a former NBA player.

The interview lasted an hour and was very sweet to watch father and son communicate for the first time. Darren shared that he had been looking for his dad for the past 4 years. He started looking when his cousin got married. His cousin also did not know his own dad but really wanted him at his wedding so he searched and found him. At the end of the wedding, Darren said he just broke down and cried having witnessed his cousin reunited with his own father. Darren went to his mom and asked her to tell him everything she knew about Eddie.

Darren had tried everything to find Eddie but since Eddie was homeless he did not have a phone or internet access or a mailing address. A week before Alexandra reached out to Darren, he had found an old Facebook page for Eddie and sent a message in hopes that Eddie would reply. Without access to Facebook, the message went unanswered but then Alexandra's message arrived.

During the interview, Darren made a special shout out to Alexandra and told her that he always knew something had been missing in his life and that she helped find that missing link, his dad.

This past Thanksgiving, Darren flew to San Francisco to reunite with his dad in person.

Who knew that social media skills are considered a talent and that they could reconnect a father and son?

Treasure

Treasure translates into money. Although all non-profit organizations need money, I think giving of money is the easiest of the gifts to give. You can give money without really getting engaged and in fact the act of giving money allows you to not get personally involved. Some people give money because they don't like to say no and others because they feel obligated. And sometimes people give to somehow right a wrong. As you will see in this next story, the motivation and love behind the gift of money matters more than the amount.

Lynne Twist shares a story in her book, *The Soul of Money*, of a food company that had done something wrong and was looking to make a large monetary donation to a hunger related organization to help smooth over the bad press. They chose The Hunger Project which Lynne had co-founded. She flew to Chicago, on her way to NY, to pick up the check. She said the offices were very fancy and when the CEO pushed the check across the desk to her she felt like it was dirty money.

The Hunger Project was a newer organization and could certainly use a \$50,000 check so she took it and put it in her brand new briefcase she has purchased just for this meeting. She then went on to NY where she had promised a friend she would give a talk to a group of church members in Harlem. The talk took place in the basement of the church and the congregants were not people of means. When she finished her story about hungry people in Africa, and how they were working to alleviate hunger, one woman, who was dressed as a maid stood up.

She said “Girl, my name is Gertrude and I like what you’ve said and I like you. Now, I ain’t got no checkbook and I ain’t got no credit cards. To me, money is a lot like water. For some folks it rushes through their life like a raging river. Money comes through my life like a little trickle. But I want to pass it on in a way that does the most good for the most folks. I see that as my right and as my responsibility. It’s also my joy. I have fifty dollars in my purse that I earned from doing a white woman’s wash and I want to give it to you.” Lynne said that after that everyone in the church basement began lining up to donate their extra change. She didn’t know where to put the donations so she pulled out her new briefcase. They raised no more than \$500 that night but Lynne said that that \$500 felt more substantial and meaningful than the \$50,000 check in the bottom of the briefcase. Lynne said “The money I received from Gertrude carried the energy of her commitment to make a difference.” When Lynne got back to California, she sent a letter to the food company with the check thanking them and suggesting they give the money to an organization that they felt strongly about. Several years later when the CEO had retired, he sent The Hunger Project a personal check for \$250,000 and said he was now ready to engage in their mission.

Ties

Ties relate to your connections and your influence. If someone famous says they are doing something or wants you to purchase or donate something, do you do it because of who they are? That is influence. For example, I attended the Walt Disney Family Museum gala event last year which was honoring John Lassiter of Pixar. When they were about finished with the live auction portion of the event, John got on stage and said he would like to add one more auction item. Whoever won this item would get a speaking part in the new Toy Story 4 movie along with movie credits and an invitation to the cast party. He was using his influence and connections as CEO of Pixar to offer this opportunity. The winning bid was \$90,000 times three people or \$270,000 which went to the museum as a donation. Another example was at the Pencils of Promise gala event I attended in Central Park in NYC. The last auction item was an opportunity to paint pottery with Gigi Hadid, fashion model and philanthropist. The winning bid on that one - \$175,000 to benefit Pencils of Promise which actually went to two bidders so \$350,000 was raised. Both John and Gigi's influence helped raise a lot of money for those organizations.

Time, talent, treasure and ties, although all very important aspects of living a generous life, can come with limits. You may say that you don't have time to volunteer. You may think you don't have any talents although we all now know that social media skills can now be listed as a talent, and as a full time student you may feel you have no money to give. And not yet having a career you may feel like you haven't created any connections yet that could be meaningful. But thought is different.

Thought

As we discussed earlier, taking a stand for what you know to be true and sharing it with others is a great gift and it can change lives for the better. And we can all do this no matter our age, our occupation or our monetary status. And time is also not an issue. In a moment, we can correct a misconception in our own thought.

Last year I experienced one of the most amazing days in my life and it all revolved around breaking down the limited view of man. I was invited to do a walk-a-thon in San Quentin which is a state prison in California which also houses death row inmates.

I knew that I wanted to be mentally prepared for that day to see these men as God sees them and not to go in with a sense of judgment or fear. My Sunday School class and I worked on some ideas for me to consider and remember while I was in prison. One of them was from the Bible where it says,

“You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”

I really needed to consider what God was seeing when all I knew of these men was they had committed crimes that had gotten them sentences from 20, 30, 40 years or life. I reasoned that what God sees is Himself reflected back to Him and that is all that is true. And any action we see in our life that is not aligned with God’s idea has no substance to affect our true nature. I also thought about MBE saying,

“Jesus beheld in Science the perfect man, who appeared to him where sinning mortal man appears to mortals. In this perfect man the Savior saw God’s own likeness, and this correct view of man healed the sick.”

Well I knew the story about these prisoners were that they were sinning mortal men but Jesus gave us a different perspective which brings healing, growth and progress.

And from an article called Place, I found this statement very helpful.

“We have to clear our vision, sweep away the rubbish of fear, impatience and of a false estimate of our fellow man and know that the One Mind shines through all and governs all.”

I thought about these statements along with the idea that God’s greatest accomplishment was all good concepts working in harmony with each other to create a very good outcome. I wasn’t sure how this was going to be a good experience but I had confidence that it would be. I walked into prison completely unafraid.

The group of the prisoners we were going to meet with are in a group called Kid Kat. They were all juvenile offenders when they were arrested and sentenced which means they were between 16-18 years old. They were sentenced to long sentences and were now in San Quentin serving their time.

Prior to the trip all I knew about prisoners is what I had seen on television or movies or read about in the newspaper. It was not a good image. But my prayer and honest listening helped me be open to the good that was present right there in prison.

Upon arriving at prison, we walked down to the playing field which also doubled as their dirt running track. We were led into a building near the track where we were going to meet the prisoners. We all sat in chairs in a circle and shook hands. They were really well spoken and super nice. Charlie, one of the inmates, stood in the middle of the circle to welcome us and to tell us how much they have been looking forward to our visit and how hard they have worked to put together a fun day. He then says we are going to do an ice breaker where we go around the circle and say our favorite movie.

From the get go, it felt a lot like summer camp other than the tall cement walls topped with barbed wire and guards carrying guns. I was kind of expecting the prisoners, or men in blue as they call themselves, to have their favorite movies be really violent ones but here came the first opportunity to drop my false estimate of these guys and see them as regular people who made a bad mistake. The movies they liked were Coming to America, Blazing Saddles, Young Frankenstein and Finding Nemo to name a few. I love all of those movies. We had that in common. We then shared who we were and how we were associated with Project Avary which was the non-profit the men in blue wanted to raise money for with the walk – a thon. Project Avary provides a 10 year mentorship program and free summer camp to kids whose parent or parents are incarcerated.

The prisoners earn 35 cents an hour yet they collected \$640 from other prisoners and they said they would have done better but they were on lock down for three weeks straight where they can't leave their cells at all so they couldn't get over to death row to ask for donations.

Next we went outside and 5 of the men in blue gave blessings from their own faith to start the day. Then we walked around the track a couple of times. Then the prison band played some songs and some of the men in blue did some spoken word. Then we walked a few more laps. And then we had men in blue and some kids whose parents are in prison share their stories. Then a few more laps.

While we walked the laps we would strike up conversations with the men in blue. One guy named Eddy was out in the sunshine in his gym shorts, shoes and no shirt stretching the back of his legs while he was reading a book. As I walked passed him I asked him if he was doing homework. He said he was trying to read a Michelle Obama speech for his Communications class which started at 3 pm.

On the next lap I started to do lunges for a challenge with the Principia College Women's volleyball team. I needed to do 100 lunges that day so I decided to do them in prison. As I rounded the turn near Eddy he shouted out to me. So I went over and explained our 30 day challenge to him. He then shared with me that he has a 20 year old daughter who wants to become a judge. He shared some of his story and why he was in prison but mostly we talked about our daughters. It was a totally normal parent to parent conversation bragging about our kids.

The next man in blue that I met was nicknamed Wallstreet. I had actually heard about him because I saw a Ted Talk that he had done while in prison. He had used his time in prison to learn about financial literacy and the emotional connection we have with money and how to understand that connection so that we don't make dumb money mistakes. He actually teaches financial literacy classes to the other prisoners

We talked for 45 minutes about the importance of understanding how to manage money and at the same time not to be controlled by money. I could have been having this conversation with one of my co-workers but instead I was having this amazing conversation with a man in blue named Wallstreet.

The day continued to break through so many of the limits that I placed on these men and prison in general. San Quentin is apparently the Harvard of prisons because of the 200 different programs available to the prisoners. You can get your AA or a 4 year college degree. You can work in the multi media lab or perform Shakespeare.

As Wallstreet told me, you do not want to be in prison but if you are, the only thing prison gives you is time. You can use it wisely or totally waste it. He had chosen to use it wisely.

At the end of the day, we all got into a circle on the field and any prisoners that were on the field at the moment could join in. We all held hands. On both sides of me I was holding hands with San Quentin prisoners. Not something I ever expected. The Executive Director of Project Avarity thanked the men in blue for hosting us. We then went back to where we started inside and sat in a circle again with just the Kid Kat men. We went around the circle to share what this day meant to each of us, prisoners and guests. Heartfelt messages were shared by everyone. One woman said what I was feeling which was she could not wait for another opportunity to come visit the men in blue.

Although I was mentally prepared to see these men as God sees them, I did not realize how easy it was actually going to be. These men made bad mistakes when they were teenagers and most of them had been in 10-20 years already with one of them who had been there 41 years. They were completely different men than who they had to have been when they arrived in prison. The classes in prison helped them take off the labels that have been placed on them as disenfranchised, mostly men of color who grew up in environments where they had no hope. Their parents might have been drug lords, they might have seen generation after generation of their family members drop out of high school, their streets could have been filled with gang activity and going to high school might

have required them to cross gang lines. In spite of this, they chose to see their unlimited potential and are bettering themselves even though some may never get out of prison. The prison sentence is not limiting their potential to learn and be better men.

I felt such a connection with so many of the men I talked with. Every day when I go home from work I drive across the overpass to get on the freeway and I look directly at San Quentin. Before my visit there I saw a state penitentiary building filled with bad men who did bad things. Now, when I look at what one little girl described as the Golden Palace where her daddy lives, I know that I have friends on the inside who are really good men who have a sense of purpose, a sense of worth, a desire to be of service and are fulfilling their potential against all odds and the false estimates that most people think of them. They are giving their all right where they are without any guarantee that they might be released from prison and become returned citizens.

This experience was my opportunity to think generously of these men and to take off the limiting labels that are consistently placed on them. I don't know the impact my thought had on them but I do know that by being willing to rethink my position on what prisoners are like, submerge my thinking in Spirit and its unlimited nature and allow Truth to renovate my heart and my mind, these men and this experience had a great impact on me. I love the quote from Albert Schweitzer, "Love is the only thing that doubles every time it is given." That is exactly how I felt after my day in prison.

We have covered a lot today on how to amp up our capacity to live generously. Remember that to truly live generously means to start at the right place and to practice the basic fundamentals of knowing our unlimited nature, seeing it in others, defining wealth accurately, having experiences refine us rather than define us and to give our all. Once we have those fundamentals under our belt, giving of time, talent, treasure, ties and thought will help you live the most generous life possible and create the greatest impact on our world.

Thank you for letting me share my ideas and stories about living generously.