Quarterly Newsletter



Perspective



GBF

Children's Bible Fellowship of New York





A Shift in Perspective –

CEO Sean Stewart shares how failure, recovery, and God's grace reshaped his understanding of strength, relationships, and ministry. Read more on pages 3-4.

Seeing Beyond Ourselves —

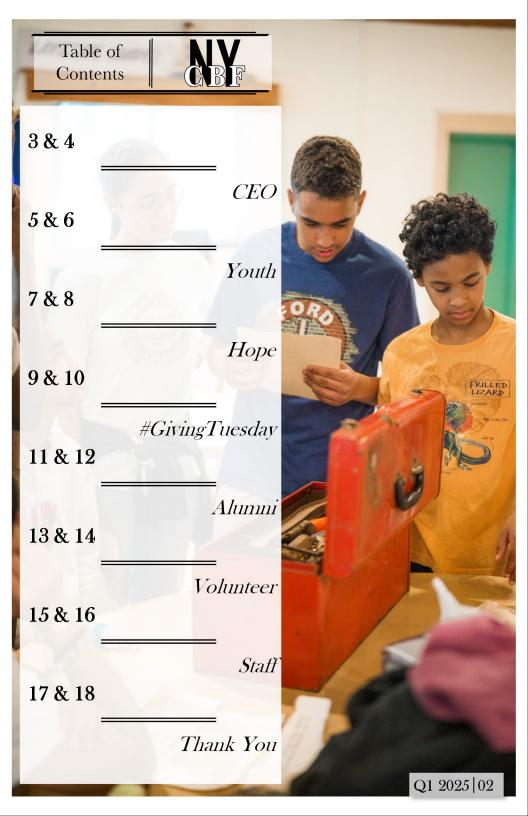
Jack MacKay and Codi Bement reflect on the moments that challenged their views of identity, success, and human connection, and how God uses these shifts to deepen their faith. Explore their stories on pages 5-8.

— The Heart of CBF —

From alumni reconnections to the power of serving, hear from those whose lives have been shaped by CBF and how they continue to impact others. Be inspired on pages 11-12.

- A New Way to See -

Fran Reid and Brittany Butterfield share how working with the special needs community has transformed their understanding of privilege, relationship, and the love of Christ. Gain fresh insight on pages 13-16.





I remember one of my first lies; I was around 5 years old. My mom asked me if I had been eating chips in my bedroom. The truth was yes—I had devoured an entire bag with the neighbor girl that morning. My mom reiterated, "You're not in trouble, I just want to know." I stood my ground and said, "No, mom, it wasn't me." There was, however, clear evidence—crumbs on the floor. At the ripe age of 5, I learned that information was power. I began developing my skills: avoid pain at all costs, trust no one, and manage and control the story. This perspective became a part of me, and I would carry it forward for decades to come.

When I first came to CBF, my perspective was rooted in the belief that I was to minister out of superior biblical understanding and give "my strength" to "the needy."

How did my perspective change? In a word: failure. Failure in my marriage, family, work, and ministry brought me to a place of poverty of spirit. A prime example would be my control-freak behavior: I would tell my wife what she could and couldn't share, and I would get angry if she didn't comply. What I was actually doing, though, was acting out of deep insecurity, driven by the belief that I needed to control what others thought of me.

A major "aha" moment came during recovery when I did my Step 4 inventory (a detailed review of significant events from my past). I had been operating from a perspective of strength, stuffing my emotions deep inside and doing everything I could to control my environment. When I shared my story with a group of Christian men, they helped me identify 31 character defects I had been carrying since childhood—some of which were evident in my opening story. These misleading perspectives shaped and influenced every



decision and action I made for over 40 years.

Through recovery, Christ has been changing my perspective. The more I share my brokenness and admit my failings, the deeper my relationships have grown. Pride had been keeping real relationships at bay, giving me a false sense of safety and comfort. I didn't realize it at the time, but weakness is the doorway to the Kingdom of God. Jesus began the Beatitudes with this statement: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God" (Matt. 5:3). I've come to understand that only God has a perspective rooted in reality. The ministry of CBF is built on a perspective of God's strength made perfect in our weakness.

One of my favorite quotes from Jean Vanier, who led a special needs ministry, is: "People come to L'Arche to serve the poor, but they only stay if they become the poor." I believe this is true for CBF as well—staying here required a change in perspective, a change that only God could bring. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9, God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." For me, this is a changed perspective—a gift, through the power of God's grace.

~Sean Stewart





There have been countless moments in my life when my perspective shifted in subtle yet lasting ways. I remember my first mission trip to Mexico as a student, where I saw poverty up close, people with barely a roof over their heads. That experience made my worries seem small and taught me early on that our problems are often measured against a much larger backdrop. Later, when I moved from a suburban home to the concrete landscape of Chicago for college, I was struck by the contrast. At first, I questioned why anyone would live amid so much concrete, away from nature. Over time, however, I began to see beauty in unexpected places: modest family homes, in the community spirit of neighborhood stores, and even in the raw energy of city life. I learned to see God's work not just in grand gestures but in the quiet persistence of everyday people.

Recently, I had a conversation that reshaped my understanding of what our programs are all about. I asked a student and his teacher what he looked forward to most when coming to CBF. I expected responses about the games, food, or activities. Instead, the student simply said, "I just enjoy being somewhere where I know people care about me, and I can just be for a while." His words struck me. They reminded me that my value isn't in perfectly planned programs but in the authenticity of human connection.

It's easy to get caught up in the details—making sure everything runs smoothly, striving for perfection. But sometimes, the most meaningful moments happen unexpectedly. I've learned that transformation happens when I am present and willing to engage. Mistakes may feel like failures, but they are often where the most growth happens.

On our CBF campus, we host Elevate retreat days, giving students a space to step away from their routines. Through classroom visits, we engage in the daily lives of their local



community. Our Church Youth Group Retreat Days create meaningful moments of connection, reminding me that the heart of our work is simply showing up for one another.

We are also in discussions with BSSWA to deepen our collaboration, a step that promises to further increase our impact. A particularly significant milestone is officially receiving our NYC Department of Education (DOE) Vendor License. More than just a certification, this license allows us to serve more students, build stronger relationships, and open new doors throughout New York City schools.

As I reflect on my experiences, I am grateful for the perspective shifts that have enriched both my life and the work I do at CBF. Every day, I see how small moments of change contribute to a larger tapestry of growth and connection. I look forward to the opportunities ahead, especially with our new DOE Vendor License creating more ways to reach students.

Through every season of change, God is present—quietly at work, guiding me through challenges and triumphs. I remain committed to embracing every shift in perspective as a chance to see the world—and our mission—with fresh eyes.

~Jack MacKay





I come from a high-achieving family where success and accomplishments were the standard. Wins mattered. Relationships were valued, but not as highly ranked. For a long time, I measured my own worth—and the worth of others—through a lens shaped by performance, achievement, and external validation. But perspective is a funny thing. It shifts when life forces you to step back.

Before coming to CBF, I had experiences that, at the time, felt like failures. And if I'm honest, some of them still do. But in the last two years, my perspective has been challenged and reshaped in ways I never expected. My understanding of value—of my own worth and the worth of others—has been radically transformed.

As a Christian, I know that our value comes from being adopted as children of God (Ephesians 1:4-6). It is rooted in His love for us and in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. And yet, the world has a way of distorting that truth. My upbringing, my experiences, and my own decisions had shaped how I viewed value—both my own and that of others. But that perspective started to shift when I stepped into the Hope Community at CBF.

Spending time with our friends with special needs, listening to their stories, and living life alongside them has opened my eyes in a way I can't fully explain. These individuals—who for so long have been pushed to the side of society—are some of the most joyful, resilient, and faith-filled people I have ever met. Their constant praise of the Lord, their unwavering optimism, their love and acceptance despite the challenges they've faced—this is what value looks like.

We are valued not because of what we achieve, but because of who God says we are. Our worth doesn't come from earthly rewards; it comes from Him, His promises, and



His word. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 reminds me that every part of the body is just as important as the other. As the Body of Christ, we are all equally valued—including those with special needs. That's why we are dedicated to reconnecting the next generation and the forgotten into real belonging in the Body of Christ.

To show our Hope Community that they are seen, loved, and valued, we have continued hosting Hope Celebrations, Retreats, and CBF Challenges—focusing on silence, solitude, prayer, and the meaning of Christmas, all within the embrace of community. As we shared in our last newsletter, we are forging new partnerships with schools in the Bronx to provide relational ministry and support for special needs students, aides, and teachers.

This journey has been one of constant learning, and for that, I am grateful. Grateful that my perspective on identity and value has transformed. Grateful for the relationships that have shaped me. And grateful that the Lord is still working in me.

I invite you to step into this journey with us. Come, experience the beauty of true belonging. See how our Special Needs ministry—and ultimately, the Lord—can shape your perspective, too.

~Codi Bement





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Giving Tuesday Total **566,493.78**



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The heart of CBF is not a place

The heart of CBF has never been tied to a place—it's the people the Lord has knit together to form a community. For so many of us, CBF wasn't just a moment in time; it was where lifelong friendships were formed, faith was deepened, and lives were changed. But perhaps the most powerful thing we take away from our time at CBF is perspective—the ability to look back and see how God was working in ways we didn't fully understand at the time.

With a little distance, we begin to realize how those experiences shaped us, how the challenges stretched us, and how the simple, everyday moments of faith and friendship planted seeds that are still growing today. Whether you were a camper, participant, staff member, or volunteer, you are part of a legacy that continues to make an impact.

You may have served in different areas of ministry, but the power has always been in our shared experiences as a community of believers. Every person who has lived, volunteered, participated in programs, or worked at CBF has a story to tell. This is your invitation to reconnect.

In a world that feels more disconnected than ever, we know how important it is to reignite the relationships that began at CBF. We want to hear from you—your stories, your memories, your testimonies of how CBF shaped your faith. Sharing those stories isn't just about nostalgia; it's about recognizing how God has been at work all along.

This isn't about going back to relive old experiences—it's about moving forward in faith. But looking back helps us see more clearly. What once felt like just another volunteer



moment, ministry workday, or summer experience, we now recognize as a season of transformation. What seemed like small moments were actually shaping us in ways we're still discovering.

As we step into the next chapter of CBF's ministry, we're creating new ways for alumni to engage, and your input is invaluable. Join us on this journey by emailing Anne Chavarro at Alumni@cbfny.org





When I was eleven—the same age as my twin daughters—I often visited CBF, a place that held a special place in my heart. I grew up just down the road, and back then, we affectionately called CBF "Camp Hope" and "Camp Joy." I remember the excitement of running down our lawns just to wave at the children on the big blue buses, which we fondly nicknamed the "blue cheese." I can still picture building fairy houses near the Chapel, giggling with my friend as we hid from one of the neighborhood gentlemen—who, at times, could be a bit grumpy.

CBF was more than a destination; it was a sanctuary. Coming from a non-religious family, I didn't fully comprehend the concept of unconditional love and forgiveness from a divine perspective. My understanding began to take shape through the teachings of my friend, who lived on the property, and through the prayers of her parents before dinner. At the time, I understood perspective as simply our viewpoint on life. Now, as a believer, I realize that true perspective is not just about how we see the world, but about how we perceive God in our lives and learn to see through the eyes of Jesus.

When tragedy strikes, many of us search for answers. I vividly recall the moment I surrendered my worries to Jesus—a moment of profound clarity. I was seventeen, just beginning my senior year of high school, when my oldest brother tragically passed away. I remember crying out to God, asking, "Why?" In my grief, I even spoke the words, "You better have needed him pretty badly." That night, an overwhelming sense of peace washed over me. I went to sleep knowing, with certainty, that my brother was safe and at peace with God. Though I couldn't fully articulate it at the time, I knew God had met me in my sorrow.

Even before I openly declared my faith, I felt the assurance of salvation. Life, however, took its toll, and my relationship with the Lord was not always as strong as it should have been. Though I felt lost at times, I never let go of my belief in His presence. Looking back, I truly believe that the Lord called my children and me to this very property years ago. He was saving me once again,



giving me the chance to live and teach my children the same perspective I had learned here so many years ago.

When life becomes overwhelming, as it often does, I find solace in silence and prayer. God gave me two ears and one mouth for a reason. I choose to try and listen attentively and speak to Jesus, fighting daily to express gratitude even in the midst of my struggles. It may seem unconventional to some, but in truth, it is simply a kingdom perspective.

Maintaining a healthy perspective during hardships is not always easy. Yet, when I seek guidance and grace from Jesus, transformation occurs. He provides me with a renewed outlook on life. Letting go and trusting God can be challenging—my pride and stubbornness often stand in the way—but the freedom I experience when I surrender to Him is truly life-changing. I am learning every struggle carries both purpose and privilege.

Perspective also involves recognizing privilege.

It is a privilege to feel overwhelmed by financial responsibilities because it means the Lord has provided a warm home, the means to pay bills, nourishing food, and a safe place to rest.

It is a privilege to feel overstimulated by the joyful voices and laughter of my children after a long, stressful day. My children may be the very reason God made me. Their laughter is proof that they are safe, healthy, happy, and thriving.

It is a privilege to have loved so deeply that loss is painful. I am grateful that my grief has transformed into grace.

Perspective is more than how I see the world—it is about seeing life through God's eyes. It is about placing my trust and love in Him, knowing that He understands the reasons behind everything. Because He does.

~Brittany Butterfield



The special needs community has a unique make-up. They are not all limited in the same way, but one commonality is that they each have a disability that is measurable. It might be a physical limitation or an intellectual one, or in some cases both. Working with them one-on-one is teaching me to learn their individual needs and as a result each relationship is formed to accommodate their limits. Seems so simple right? Kinda obvious?

This lesson began when I had a child with Aspergers Syndrome. My other four kids could easily conform to the limits and guidelines that we set. My third child could not. Don't get me wrong, not everything was a battle, but there were enough times that it felt like every decision to comply was a challenge. By the time I realized she was not rebelling and honestly living within her limitations to obey, damage had already been done.

The punishment (rejection) from her parents caused an anger and hurt that has taken her years to overcome. The process of healing with her has helped me to see that I saw my authority over my children as a right and not a privilege. Her specific needs forced me to see "her" not as an extension of myself but as an individual creation from God, on loan to me. Getting to know her particular needs, demands, and limitations was the beginning of a real relationship with my daughter. It also helped to individualize the same for my other four kids.

Over the last 4 years the relationships I have had with our special needs participants have taken this lesson to the next level. It is easy to acknowledge, accept, and accommodate the visible needs and limitations within this group. However, they opened my eyes to the importance of individual consideration as well. I have come to see that discovering each



specific need and limitation is not an inconvenience to be endured but a privilege to be experienced.

Through my experience with the special needs community I have come to learn that, all too often, they feel like they are a burden. Their basic needs for care tend to be the limit of the social interactions they receive. It's a privilege to be a part of building community with them, acknowledging the individuals that they are, and honoring the spirit God has placed in each one of them. Watching the healing take place when they can honestly see the love of Christ not just in us, but overflowing in them, is amazing.

The perspective that has come from working with the special needs community is having an ongoing impact on my attitude towards and expectations of others. It takes intentional effort to get out of my comfort zone of accomplishment and invest in the connections that build real relationships.

~Fran Reid





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We are incredibly grateful for you, our Community. Your partnership has created greater opportunities for discipleship to NYC Youth and the Special Needs Community. Thank you for selflessly providing your resources, talents, and time with CBF. You are the very heart that moves the mission forward.

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