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Register

How I was inspired by always being last pick at football

Credo

Matt Bird



Have you ever felt slightly alone, overlooked or left behind? Perhaps it was your first day at a new school or university, that promotion you never got and never found out why, or the party invitation that didn't seem to find its way to your door.

I remember, as if it were yesterday, my sports lessons at school, where the two most athletic students took it in turns to pick people for their teams. The pool of talent got smaller and smaller until the two usual suspects were left. I was one of them. By this time the team leaders

were of the attitude that they would rather leave the two of us behind.

Being alone, overlooked or left behind in relationships is one of the most painful experiences in life. Most of us will remember at least one time when we have known feelings of loneliness, isolation and rejection.

For some it's an everyday feeling. More than 300,000 children and young people are excluded from school each year, and 59 per cent of ex-offenders are unable to reintegrate into communities after leaving prison and find themselves incarcerated again within 12 months. Half a million elderly people spend Christmas Day alone and those in care homes are twice as likely to feel severely lonely. While our country is becoming more racially diverse, our cities are becoming more racially segregated.

These realities create a sense of "them" and "us", "haves" and "have nots". They create resentment and

anger, resulting in a society with strained and difficult relationships. Feeling alone, overlooked or left behind — or as the policy people call it "socially isolated and excluded" — is one of the greatest challenges of 21st-century society.

Many of us are familiar with the Bible story of Joseph, a young man who was wrongly imprisoned. Joseph found himself in jail alongside the Pharaoh's sommelier and the two became friends. Even though Joseph helped the sommelier, the Bible says that the wine server quickly "forgot him" (Genesis xl, 23). Two years passed before the sommelier thought about Joseph and put in a good word for him with the Pharaoh. Soon after Joseph was released and went on to become the Pharaoh's chief civil servant, administering his entire kingdom. This story does have a happy ending, but unfortunately that is not the experience for many who have been forgotten in our society.

This year the charity that I lead, Cinnamon Network, looked for church-based community projects that are building relationships with and among young people in their communities who feel alone, overlooked or left behind. Shortlisted projects were pitched at a *Dragons' Den*-style event for a place in our programme to help them franchise their projects so that hundreds of other churches can follow their lead.

The winner was Box Up Crime, which helps churches to run boxing academies to engage isolated young people. We need to encourage innovation and the scaling of community projects that combat isolation and exclusion.

Far from being full of religious rules and regulations, the Bible is a book of relationships. It speaks of a God who reached out throughout history to have a loving relationship with humanity. God never wants us

to feel alone, overlooked or left behind. God reassured Joshua saying, "I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua i, 5) and Jesus said to his disciples, "surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew xxviii, 20). God wants us to know he is with us.

Let's not forget one another like the sommelier forgot Joseph. Let's look out for young people and students who are starting a new school or university. Let's do more to ensure that the people in our communities who might feel overlooked are invited and included. Let's overcome our inner fear and prejudices to help people who are unlike us. Why not reach out today to someone who you might not normally speak to, and help to build a society that includes all.

Matt Bird is an international speaker and author of *The Relationship Book*