

Stories from the Faith Based Unit - Richard's Story

To overcome the initial distrust and suspicion inmates in the Faith Based Unit had for him as a middle-class Pakeha Christian with very different life experience to theirs, Bible studies tutor Richard Nicoll had to learn to open his heart.

"I had to tell the men where I was coming from, and say that without God I'm nothing, with nothing to offer. I'm a sinner like everybody else," he says.

Richard uses themes like the "Father heart of God", and the "mercy of God" to bring home the Bible's relevance to the men. "God is the God of getting a second chance, and a third chance. Provided we make genuine efforts to change our life, he will always be there to pick us up."

He uses the example of Moses, who killed an Egyptian, but was later chosen by God to become a leader of Israel. "I show them (the inmates) the value of the scriptures, their background and context, and how to do daily devotions."

Inmates have time to study the Bible, and ask a number of "great and inspired" questions, says Richard. They are at various stages in their spiritual journeys, but Richard is encouraged in his work when individuals make a strong commitment to God.

"They trust me now and God ministers to them." He cites a recent church service he and pastor Gabe Aiono held, after which every inmate there took part in a warm embrace. This strong sense of Christian community has developed only slowly at the unit since it opened a year ago, says Richard.

"It's a real privilege to be God's ambassador, his hands and feet in that setting," he says.