

From a life of crime to a life serving Christ - this is one of the most inspiring testimonies you will ever read. Find out more about Steve Cattell and his journey from prison to freedom thanks to Jesus.

Breaking the chains

Steve Cattell liked phone boxes. He wasn't interested in whether they were the old-fashioned red ones or the new open-plan kiosks. No, he was more interested in their money making tendencies.

He'd play them like a fruit machine – “We could actually open a box under 10 seconds and we kind of went through the whole country and we was literally on about three or four thousand pound a day,” he says.

The money was shared between him and his heroin addicted friend Paul. “I lived a compulsive lifestyle - addiction – [my money] went on women, clothes, holidays, jewellery, gambling and the occasional drugs as well.”

Brought up in care, Steve Cattell was a career criminal. From an early age his one passion in life was for stealing and breaking into houses. He's spent about 25 years in prison, 12 of which was spent in solitary as he was considered to be too dangerous. Married four times – “I've lost count of how many children I've got” – he admits that “Burglary gave me a fantastic adrenalin buzz. It just kind of fed an addiction that I had and it overtook my life.”

In short, Steve Cattell was not the kind of man that you'd want to meet on a dark night. But then he met Jesus Christ.

Now, in a new book, Steve tells his life story. He talks of his compulsion to commit crime and why prison didn't deter him. His description of Ford open prison as “like a holiday camp” will raise some eyebrows and he freely admits he viewed prison as an occupational hazard, “Prison was what I did between burglaries”.

He describes how prison utterly failed to rehabilitate him, rather having the precise opposite effect: “The only thing that got me through that sentence was the hate and the anger I felt towards the human race,” he says. “I couldn't wait to get out and attack society, to inflict as much pain as possible.”

When a heroin addict friend became a Christian Steve's life too began a steady transformation. He is now a Christian and has left behind his life of crime.

Steve writes honestly about his struggle to fit in at church. Having spent his life with criminals, mixing with fine, upstanding church folk has proved tricky. He looked to his church to provide the sense of belonging and acceptance he'd left behind when he walked away from the criminal community but has felt let down by the wariness of church members towards him.

Having been helped with his crime addiction by Offenders Anonymous Steve now works with the organisation, speaking in prisons, schools and colleges. He moves ahead in the hope that his faith has given him.

“I'm learning that nothing is impossible for God,” he writes. “No one is outside his forgiveness – all anyone has to do is ask. And if God is there for a man like me, breaking the unbreakable and mending the broken heart of a broken man, he's there for everyone.”

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Some quotes for this article are taken from Steve's testimony, available to read at www.transformed.org.uk/lives/steve_cattell