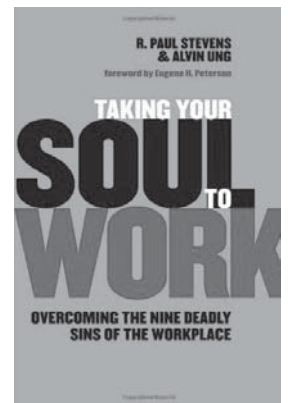


# Taking your Soul to Work: Overcoming the 9 Deadly Sins of the Workplace

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by R.Paul Stevens & Alvin Ung



■ reviewed by Sally Orwin

**T**his book is refreshing and inspiring. It is the result of a collaboration between Alvin Ung and Paul Stevens who present a gentle yet ruthlessly honest approach to what it means to ‘take your soul to work’ in the modern world. As Eugene Petersen writes in the introduction in reference to the 27 times that Jesus is identified as a ‘worker’ in John’s gospel: ‘Work doesn’t take us away from God; it continues the work of God.’ (p ix) This sets the theological approach in which Ung and Stevens draw on wisdom from a range of writers, for example, the eleventh-century monk Bernard of Clairvaux on Pride (p17) and the fourth-century Evagrius of Pontus on *acedia* or Restlessness (p57). Whilst many of these stretch back into history they ring true in the modern world in which the ‘Seven deadly sins’ - with the addition of Boredom and Restlessness - are as rife as ever (see table at the foot of this review).

The book is structured into three parts. Beginning with an outline of the nine deadly sins, the authors go on in part 2 to examine the nine spiritual fruits which counter these sins. Part 3 explores the godly outcomes which result. For example, the sin of Pride is countered by the fruit of Joy and the outcome is continuous prayer; the sin of Boredom is countered by the fruit of Peace and the outcome is Heavenly-Mindedness. This

means the whole is broken down into sections of five to seven pages making it easy to navigate directly to one sin in particular and its corresponding biblical fruit and outcome. The book therefore provides a resource to dip into and find encouragement with a particular struggle in the workplace. At the same time, the structure allows for an individual to work through the material as a whole from beginning to end in prayerful contemplation over a few weeks, or in discussion with a group. For a book which seeks to span the academic with the more popular, it has a rich bibliography and a comprehensive Index of Authors, Index of Subjects and Scripture References which allow for more in-depth study.

Although the authors often use the term struggle, the book is refreshing in its head-on use of the biblical term sin and what they call its toxic effects. (p11). It is particularly appealing in drawing on a range of spiritual and theological traditions (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox) without losing a solid biblical basis. The narrative is laced with both grace and exhortation. As a result, the message does not lose its transformative bite and the book does not degenerate into a theological self-help manual. In their final conversation together, Ung asks Stevens if a ‘deeper understanding of workplace spirituality has made you more effective in doing your work?’. Stevens answers: ‘Possibly, but that would not be its main purpose. Spirituality is not a motivational



▶▶ technique for reviving tired workers. It is not a three-step Christian program for getting things done. Christian spirituality is far more subversive. It's the Spirit of God working to transform us from within; our inner transformation then affects everything we do and why we do it.' (p172)

In addition, it is helpful that both authors have grounded their conclusions not only in biblical wisdom and theological writings but also in their own experience of life in a range of workplaces. Ung is currently Fellow at Malaysia's national investment agency with experience as a financial analyst and a senior telecommunications manager (p3). Stevens is Professor Emeritus of Marketplace Theology and Spirituality at Regent College, Vancouver and cites previous experience as a pastor, carpenter and business person. As a result, the book's encouragements have an authenticity about them which can be applied across a range of working experiences.

At the same time, the struggle with sin which the book describes is a universal struggle. Some readers may feel it does not provide enough *specific* help with specific *work* problems rather than, say, problems which we might broadly term relational or concerned with the development of character and which

therefore exist both within and without the workplace. There are some useful connections with workplace problems, for example, the section on self-control encourages us to think less of 'work-life balance' than the fact that it is the Spirit who gives us self-control in dealing with work addiction and the overwhelming pressures of modern life. Thus our hearts become 'lined up with our passionate God' rather than 'living a completely composed life with all our priorities lined up like ducks in a row' (p91).

So the sins or struggles addressed occur across the whole of life and the material is applicable at work as well as in those places in which we may feel we lay down our work to rest. This is what gives the book its spiritual edge although it is slightly at odds with the specific nature of its title. The epilogue does an excellent job of helping to summarise what Ung and Stevens call the key questions: 'How do we keep company with Jesus Christ while we work? And how does God keep company with us while we work?' (p173). The authors conclude that the essence of this is actually not distinguishing between work and life because God is in the centre of all things, all life is sacred and when we discover God is in the centre of everything there is true balance. ■

Sally Orwin has degrees in History and Psychology, and provides consultancy in change and development to charities, churches, individuals and SMEs. Sally is an editor of this journal.



Sin	Fruit	Outcomes
Greed	Goodness	Persistent Gratitude
Pride	Joy	Continuous Prayer
Lust	Love	Beautiful Purity
Gluttony	Self-Control	Joyful Relinquishment
Anger	Gentleness	Surrendered Contentment
Sloth	Faithfulness	Life-Giving Rhythms
Envy	Kindness	Neighbour-Love
Restlessness	Patience	Vocational Confidence
Boredom	Peace	Heavenly-Mindedness