

R. Paul Stevens and Alvin Ung. *Taking Your Soul to Work: Overcoming the Nine Deadly Sins of the Workplace*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

*Taking Your Soul to Work: Overcoming the Nine Deadly Sins of the Workplace* proposes an “eyes-open” as opposed to an “eyes-closed” spirituality. Co-authors Paul Stevens and Alvin Ung have teamed up to write a volume filled with real-life stories about workplace dilemmas and much practical advice on how to cultivate one’s spiritual life in the workplace. Stevens is no stranger to a theology of work, having authored numerous books and taught dozens of graduate-level courses on the subject over the years. More than that, he is an official “nonretiree” who believes working is a lifelong calling. Ung is a financial analyst who specializes in connecting his Christian faith to work.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One identifies nine soul-sapping workplace sins (e.g., pride, greed, lust, etc.) that hinder spiritual growth. Part Two names nine life-giving resources (e.g., joy, goodness, love, self-control, etc.) for workplace spirituality. Part Three describes nine outcomes (e.g., prayer, gratitude, purity) of cultivating spirituality at work.

Each chapter begins with a conversation between Stevens and Ung on a specific workplace theme like “pride” or its flipside, “joy.” Then they unpack the theme, drawing on the wisdom of the Christian scriptures and tradition, plus their own varied workplace experiences. Each chapter concludes with an action plan, case study, and/or reflection exercises designed to foster spiritual growth while one works.

This volume is a great resource for Christians who want to restore their spiritual passion and take their souls to work, and for pastors who want to learn how to encourage all God’s people to view their workplace as a legitimate arena for Christian ministry.

However, I do have a few problems with the book. First, I followed the authors’ advice and read it from beginning to end. But after reading Part One, the experience almost sucked the life out of my soul. It is an intense 55-page treatment of nine deadly workplace sins. Reading it non-stop is itself a soul-sapping experience. I would strongly encourage readers to alternate between reading a single chapter on one of the workplace sins like “pride” and then reading the chapter on its life-giving counterpart, namely “joy.” In fairness, the authors do suggest this approach as an option in their “How to

Use this Book” section.

Another problem I have relates to the question of the role of the Christian community in cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of believers. There is but a single mention of how communal identity as God’s people helps to cultivate, shape, and form the fruit of the Spirit in individual lives. Only once in the entire book (131) do the authors share an anecdote about a Christian man from Malaysia who mentored and disciplined fellow Christians, helping them manifest the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. Not even in the crucial section about cultivating covenant relationships (84-85) do they point to the role of the Christian community in nurturing this virtue. They assume that it is up to individual Christians to cultivate spirituality at work.

However, as an evangelical Anabaptist, I believe it is almost impossible for individual Christians to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit apart from active participation in Christian community. We desperately need one another’s help as God’s people (as Stevens and Ung know very well). Consider, in this regard, Philip D. Kenneson, *Life on the Vine: Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Christian Community* (InterVarsity Press, 1999).

In spite of these deficiencies, *Taking Your Soul to Work* is helpful for Christians who want to learn more about how to live into their identity as the people of God in today’s workplace. It would make an ideal volume for discussion in a church-based small group, thereby adding the essential communal resourcing that is needed in order to be Christians where we work, live, and play.

*Raymond O. Bystrom*, Adjunct Professor of Biblical Studies, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary/ACTS, Langley, British Columbia