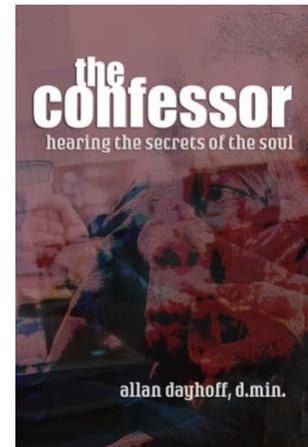


Enjoy this preview of Al Dayhoff's coming book!

Introduction: What I See and Hear

Washington Irving wrote the timeless short story, “Rip Van Winkle,” in 1819. Rip hikes into the Catskill Mountains with his loyal dog to get away from his nagging wife. To his surprise, a man with a keg of spirits calls his name. (I’m hoping this will happen to me one day!) Then Rip hears another noise ahead and sees fancily-dressed men bowling. Still standing with the man who called him by name, Rip drinks the spirits and falls asleep—deeply.



When Rip awakens, his musket is rusted and the wood is worn away. His dog is gone. His beard reaches past the middle of his chest. He walks into the village where he has lived for many years. Yet he knows no one, and no one knows him. The townspeople wonder, “Who is this ragged misplaced stranger? Is he running from something?”

Panicked, Rip declares his loyalty to King George III, only to find out a man named George Washington has been elected as the new nation’s leader. An elderly woman recognizes the confused Rip and explains many of his friends died in the war – the Revolutionary War.! Sadly, his wife is dead also. Yet there is another Rip Van Winkle in town—his own grown son!

The cultural shock of sleeping for 20 years never leaves Rip. He does not fit in the present but reminisces about the world he used to know.

Rip is similar to many who orbit in the church for most of their lives. I am one of them. I spent nearly seven years in post-graduate school, found a woman who would marry me, helped raise and launch two children, and pastored for over 25 years. In those 25 years, I prepared sermons 20 hours a week under the pressure of delivering original, thought-provoking messages to good Christian people who had already heard 1,000 sermons. I prayed for these people, visited them when they were sick, was present in their traumas both small and life-threatening, and taught the rich doctrines of our faith. This was a noble call, and is for others also.

I suspect the road I took for 25 years led to orthodox real estate where I spent most of my waking hours and conversations talking about the same things over and over. The “house culture” of this world demanded I get more precise about whatever theological construct I addressed.

I got bored. May I say that? I woke up in a Blues Bar.

In the Blues Bar, I know no one, and no one knows me. This world is way different than anything I remember, as if I have been asleep for over 20 years! I begin to see but I don't see. I hear, but I don't hear. I ask myself, “How did I get here?”

Then someone sees me. Maybe my bewildered look invites him. His name is Francis, an older, bearded man. Francis is a regular at the bar, where he is at home. When Francis talks to me, his words are confusing. Yet he is intent on me hearing him. I have nowhere to go, and good manners say you give a guy some time, right? The more he talks, the more Francis' mental illness shows. I grow anxious. If I diss him knowingly or unknowingly, will he make a scene? Will he label me? Will I encounter this same guy every time I come to the bar? The only thing I can do is listen.

My first level of listening aims at what is “off” or “wrong” with what he says. I say nothing out loud but categorize his words in my mind. I have little experience talking to someone with mental illness. Everyone else in the bar seems okay with Francis. Why can't I be?

Then Francis says, “I go to his grave every week.”

I don't want to know. I don't want to hear. I don't want this conversation to continue. I don't want Francis thinking he can Velcro himself to me every time I show up. If I take the bait, I might be listening to this guy for another hour! Yet out of my mouth comes, “Whose grave, Francis?”

“My son's grave,” Francis answers.

My heart breaks. “Tell me more.”

Before my eyes, this old, crazy man turns into a careful storyteller. He is retired military, loves motorcycles, has not been good at marriage, travels the world, adores bourbon,

lives nearby in an apartment, and wants to learn to dance but sees “no way in hell” to learn.

“Your son’s grave? What happened, Francis?” I ask.

He tells me his young son, drove recklessly and almost made the curve – but the curve won. He hit an oncoming truck head on. Probably didn’t even feel it.

A bond begins between Francis and me. He looks less crazy and more haunted from losing his son. When he finishes telling me this story, Francis, the careful story-teller departs, and the mentally unstable Francis returns.

Because I come from a world of Christians talking *to* Christians *about* Christianity, I find, in my bar, a world I hardly know and can hardly fit in. But something happens to me when I come to the bar. It is full of people who want to tell me something. This is my Rip Van Winkle opportunity: to hear and understand a world I have been sleeping through while inside the church for 25 years.

My wife begins to come to the bar with me when I invite her to dance. Deb and I begin to swing dance in the bar with our new friends. Growing up Baptist, I never danced because you might start drinking, smoking, and dancing like some Presbyterians do. (God forbid!) However, dance becomes more than random movement to me. Instead, in the dance, precious friendships and conversations happen.

My dear friend Diana and I are dancing. Diana is a former Pentecostal, current Catholic, political advisor, and beauty. In the middle of our dance, she says, “Al, you are my Confessor!” I laugh, make a joke to cover my ignorance and miss the moment. Diana remains steady, “Don’t you see, so many in this bar come to tell you something.”

“I don’t know what to do or say, Diana!” I reply.

Her words stun me. “You don’t need to do anything! You listen, hear, hold, and watch faith and healing stir!”

I hear a distant thunder, men bowling, men lamenting, women confiding, as I wake from my long period of slumber. I can hardly comprehend what I hear as I awaken to something new though it has been right there all along.

A Confessor—when I hear the word, my only association is with a Catholic priest hearing confessions. Yet I realize Diana is right! I experience a special relationship spark when I receive the sacred hurts and hopes of people in the bar. Those who need to tell me something become my parishioners *and* my teachers.

My formal training for ministry focused on telling the Gospel message. I learned to present the gospel with an ultimate goal of getting people into my church as quickly as possible. If they would not respond to my presentation or come to my church, then I moved on. Rather like multi-level marketing.

I still believe there is a time to tell the Gospel. I've come to believe, **it's when someone asks.**

The church's mission field is out in the Wild. My journey into the Wild involves learning how to embody the role of the Confessor. It radically changes the way I think and the way I am present in people's lives. People who are not Christians invite me into their lives.

The role of the Confessor is a way into the Wild in our time and space. "Truth-ing, telling and presenting," has its time and place, but, because professional ministers have not been in the Wild in so long, the church overplayed its hand, telling people what to be and do without understanding the struggles they experience. My church culture appoints me to execute a worship service with me in the role of talking, others in the role of listening, and all of us assuming I am supposed to have all the answers. This formula isn't going so well.

This mission field in the Wild is full of trauma. Unconfessed events and failures make a soul heavy. It's like living in a house where the basement and attic are crammed full of stuff. The ceiling below the attic is caving in and must be propped up. The basement has no more room for storage, and, because no sunlight gets in, mold grows in the dark.

Almost everyone I meet is looking for someone who can listen, hear, hold, and intercede for them as healing and faith stir. **Confession is more than telling your sins. Confession is telling the hopes of the heart. It's processing out loud the viability of God in the excruciating events of life.** Confession is a pathway to healing!

As I write, I have been traveling through Indonesia. I often see the three monkey statues –hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. This theme finds its way into the Hindu culture and teachings. But this is not the way of the soul. The soul longs to tell someone what it sees, hears, and speaks. It's as if we are designed to confess.

A Confessor patiently waits for someone to speak these things. Whenever I step into my bar, my parish, two questions are in my heart: **What are you thinking?** and **Are you being nice to yourself?** These questions come from inside my soul. God's Spirit leads me to ask them. They just seem right.

"What are you thinking?" seems innocent enough, many don't want to tell me what they are thinking, until they do. The mind is often heavy, rehearsing over and over the same thoughts for years and years. Remember the wailing of Gollum in *Lord of the Rings* when he loses the ring and his life? Gollum's wailing reveals the torments of his soul. Everyone wails in some manner.

People are not accustomed to being asked, "What are you thinking?" My bar peeps love to make fun of me for asking this question. (I love it too!) Yet over time, asking the question, allows people to entrust me with a hurt that has been hidden deeply in their heart or under a tattoo.

It takes some time for the soul to test the scaffolding around such a question. "Is this a trick?" "Do I have to say something smart?" "Will you tell others what I tell you?" "Can I even trust myself to say it out loud?" "Who really cares anyway?" Yet the soul deeply longs to tell its hurts, be heard, and find refuge in another.

To the question, **"Are you being nice to you?"** I hear a wide range of responses. "I'm trying to." "What do you think?" "Of course not!" What kind of question is that?" These responses point to a soul full of regrets, hopes, needs to process out loud, and most of all, desire for a relationship with a Higher Power.

Of course, I believe the Higher Power is God and Jesus of the historic Christian faith. But for most, the soul needs a starting place beginning where they are. Every person is formed in the image of God. Every day, as I walk into the Wild, I grow in deeper respect of the Image of God in the non-Christian. It's there! It has a compass, a mind, a hunch of what is right. Serving as Confessor for the Image of God in each person is a profound and effective way to enter into the Wild.

Beyond these questions, another entry point into the sacred ground of another person's life for a Confessor is something people wear. On their skin. Tattoos. (Maybe you have seen my book, *Tattoos...Telling the Secrets of the Soul?* Tattoostoryhunters.com)

Honestly, I keep trying to move beyond tattoos and research something new, but I can't. I feel like an Egyptian archaeologist who keeps finding another burial chamber under the current chamber and can't stop poking around the floor because another discovery awaits! So it is with tattoos.

The Image of God is so desperate to talk, it's telling its story and secrets on the live canvas of human skin—in permanent ink. I completely missed it for many years! Tattoos are confessions looking for a Confessor. They are designed as much by the subconscious as the conscious. Often, they can hold secrets from their owner for years. So many people are going to a carefully chosen tattoo artist to tell the secrets of the soul.

Sitting in a bamboo bar in Balian Beach, Indonesia (put it on your bucket list!), a man next to me orders a rice bowl and a BinTang beer. I guess he is around 30 years old, a surfer with long blond hair, muscular, and tattooed from his chin down. I know tattoos are sacred surfaces I must respect because they invariably have a sensitive story underneath.

"I like your ink, friend," I say. Then I mention my interest and research on tattoos. I wait while we both look out at the huge wave surf.

Still looking out at the waves, he points to a tattoo, "Yeah, this is my first tattoo." It is a heart crumbling apart with an arrow through it. "I got it for my mother," he explains.

I ask, "How so?"

"Well, she gave me up for adoption when she was 16. She gave all her kids up for adoption," he answers.

"I'm sorry," I say.

He replies, "Yeah, we all got stuff; this is just mine."

Pointing to another tattoo, I ask, “What’s that one?”

“My sister. We met when I was 22 and she was 19. We never found a way to stay in touch, but I still love her.”

“And that tattoo?” as I point to a masked man.

“Oh, that’s my old man. One day I might meet him. I don’t think he’s a bad guy. Maybe his dad abandoned him too,” he answers.

My friend goes on to tell me the stories of maybe 20 tattoos etched on his arms. Each one has to do with family and a reunion he hopes will happen before he dies. As he leaves, he thanks me and asks if he might email me. I say, “Sure!”

The Wild is unfamiliar with a Confessor, but longs for one to come.

The Confessor. How did I miss this?

This book will explore these questions:

Where is the space for the Confessor today?

What is the history of the Confessor?

How might we learn from tattoo artists about being a Confessor?

Why are Priests from the past important in understanding the Confessor?

When are poets and songwriters helpful in hearing confessions?

In what ways does Mister Rogers instruct us in the ways of the Confessor?

How do animal lovers show us the nature of a Confessor?

Why is it necessary for Confessor’s to take extra care of their inner world?

What are the habits of God's Image for which a Confessor searches?

Learning the role of the Confessor is a fascinating journey. I pray God uses my experiences to invite you into the Wild to be a Confessor.

"The Confessor" will be released this summer. To order, go to our website [here](#).

Other books by Al Dayhoff, Executive Director of Evangelize Today Ministries. Use links below to order.

The Genius in Your Wound: Life's Worst Can Reveal Your Best

[Paperback](#) [eBook](#)

Tattoos: Telling the Secrets of the Soul

[Paperback](#) [eBook](#)

Church in a Blues Bar: Rethinking Evangelism in a Post-Christian Culture

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