

2nd Opinion: Allow moment to refine, not define

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My favorite feature on the PC in my office is the undo button. My computer skills are minimal, and my propensity to hit the wrong key is pronounced. But having an undo button or ctrl+Z affords me the chance to make things right. I can reverse an error or recover a deleted document just by clicking the mouse on this tool.

Wouldn't it be a hoot if life came equipped with an undo button? We could annul our gaffes, retract our foul ups and rescind our misapprehensions. But an undo button was not part of our birth package. We make mistakes. We mess up. We are very flawed and brittle, very broken human beings, who always will fall short of God's glory and our own greatest dreams. And yet it is error-prone, imperfect folk like you and me who fend for their family, raise children, go to work, populate the boardrooms of Fortune 500 companies, establish institutional policies, interface with shifting cultural paradigms, dispatch troops to fight heart-rending wars in faraway places and attend worship, among other things.

A few weeks ago, I was a panelist at a community conversation at Brite Divinity School, and in response to a questioner, I replied, "Being and doing church is messy business." If anyone doubts this, read the Apostle Paul's

missives to the churches at Thessalonica, Corinth, Galatia, Colossae and Ephesus. Even Paul's thank-you note to the church at Philippi, which is known as a joyous letter, references a messy dispute between two prominent parishioners that threatened to undermine the cohesiveness of the church. There is nothing tidy, neat and unsullied when it comes to being and doing church or being and doing conventions.

And so in the give-and-take of folk interacting with each other, even in the precincts of the holy, we are reminded all too often that mistakes have consequences. Our misjudgments matter. Even our little errors can have debilitating collateral effects. A seemingly miniscule blooper or blunder can perpetuate stereotypes, spawn ill-advised practices, engender shame and bring out the worst in us. An inadvertent misread or miscue has the potential to hurt feelings, ruin relationships, promote apathy and mitigate distrust.

So here we are, fragile folk, with good religion, mostly well-intentioned, trying our best to relate to one another in the midst of life's imperfections. And one textbook response to the revelation of life's imperfections and ours is that we vacillate between blaming ourselves and blaming others because somebody must be to blame. Consequently, progress is stifled and disagreements are accentuated because it's easier to stop and raise Cain than it is to admit to our shortcomings, regain our equilibrium and take the risks necessary to increase momentum in the direction of God's purposes and the fulfillment of God's will.

On Tuesday, Oct. 31, directors of the Executive Board of our beloved Baptist General Convention of Texas [met in a special called session](#). The Executive Board directors heard the findings of the quest into the alleged mismanagement and misappropriation of church-starting monies in the lower Rio Grande Valley. The report was painful, repugnant and sobering. And whatever actions the Executive Board takes to address this egregious wrong, one thing I'm certain of is that the probe and the subsequent

reactions will remind us of our faultiness and insufficiencies. Yes, mistakes matter. No, we do not have an undo button. And even further, Walter B. Shurden is right; Baptists are “not a silent people.” But most importantly, it is by the grace of God that we will get past this moment if we allow it to refine us, not define us.

I’m rereading a book, *Marching Off the Map*, by Halford Edward Luccock, who was, for more than two decades, a professor at Yale Divinity School. In this book, Luccock, who died in 1960, presents a sermon titled “Keeping Life Out of Stopping Places.” A stopping place is a place where we become transfixed instead of transfigured. The Valley tumult is a big deal, but it is not the pivot on which our convention spins. Our convention’s commitment to missions, evangelism and ministry is unwavering. Our message continues to be that God sent Jesus into the world because he desperately loves us.

This message will be front and center at the [annual meeting](#) to be held in the Dallas Convention Center, Nov. 13-14. Join us as we move in the direction of God’s vision for our convention. That’s a vision I, for one, am not willing to undo.

Together, we are doing more.

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in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.