

Peter Was Like a Tube of Toothpaste

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LEE’S SUMMIT, Mo.—Of the 12 apostles, the one that the New Testament portrays with the greatest detail is Peter. He has been called the chief apostle and the spokesman for the apostles, and some proclaim him as the first pope.

But I don’t think, until now, that anyone has ever portrayed him as a tube of toothpaste. That statement is not meant as an insult because we all share that distinction.

Examples of brashness

Peter was a brash young man when Jesus called him to be an apostle, and his three and a half years of training during Jesus’ ministry did nothing to cure that—at least until just before the crucifixion.

Let’s remember some of his famous brash examples.

- Peter liked to do things his own way, even having the audacity to rebuke Jesus for the Christ saying something that Peter didn’t like, if you can imagine anyone doing that (Mark 8:30-33).
- When the garrison came to arrest Jesus, it was Peter who drew his sword and attempted to begin a violent revolution.
- Peter even pledged that he would never deny Jesus, no matter what anybody else did (Matthew 26:31-35).

During times of stress

But, when the real pressure was on, Peter showed what was in his tube of toothpaste. Just like me, and probably just like you.

Let me explain.

Recently my family and I have been under a lot of stress due to a major life change. Just so you’ll know, this is a major change but not unusual and definitely not life or health threatening. It’s stressful nonetheless.

Under times of stress I discover that I have a vocabulary that is different from my vocabulary under normal circumstances. I seem to be acquainted with hundreds

of words that I didn't even know existed, most of which have four letters. Worst of all, those words seem to fit the attitudes born of the current circumstances.

So I'm like a tube of toothpaste. When squeezed, what's really inside comes out. Once it's out, it's there for everyone to see.

Worse, I can't get it back into the tube. And what comes out of that tube—at least in my case—isn't very pretty.

Peter's ugly mistakes

It wasn't very pretty in Peter's case either.

In spite of his protestations of unbreakable loyalty, Peter did exactly what Jesus told him he would do, and then he magnified it. Not only did he deny Jesus three times, he "began to curse and to swear, saying, 'I do not know the man!'" (Matthew 26:74).

When he was squeezed, what was really inside came out. And it's right there on the pages for everyone to read.

Peter's new behavior

But we also see something else about Peter. When he remembered Jesus' words, "he went out and wept bitterly."

Peter, maybe for the first time, saw what was inside himself and realized that his arrogance was standing in the way of his faith. His insistence on wanting to do things his own way was blocking God's intent for his life. "He went out and wept bitterly."

A few weeks later, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he exhibited the type of surrendered faith that can come only from a man fully repentant. When squeezed, a confident, bold faith emerged even under the threat of persecution and death (Acts 3-4).

That's what I mean when I say we are like tubes of toothpaste. When squeezed, what's inside comes out.

What comes out of your tube when you are squeezed?