

## Threads of Hope Sewing Devotion 12

Last month, we looked at the history of the needle and a verse that God includes in the Scripture regarding a camel and a needle. The verse shows us Jesus used ordinary items that would have been very familiar at the time—camels and needles—to illustrate the point that no one can get to heaven by riches, works or any other form of merit. We can only gain eternal life with God by accepting the gift of Jesus’s sacrifice for our sin.

Today, we are going to look at another common sewing notion, and although it isn’t specifically named in the Bible, we’ll look at a concept that goes along with this item. I think today’s lesson will have you on pins and needles!

Of course, we are talking about pins. As you would suspect, pins have a long history that closely aligns with the history of needles. Early ideas for the pin came about because people used thorns or pieces of bone to hold pieces of cloth together. Eventually, metal pins from iron, bronze, brass, zinc and copper were manufactured. Just as with the needle industry, the drawn-wire process changed pin-making from a cottage industry in people’s homes to a factory production. By the mid-1600’s, whole families were employed in pin-making factories in the job known as a pinner. It seems hard for us to imagine today but in times past, pins were hard to come by. Good pins were as prized as jewelry and often handed down as cherished inheritances. Expensive pins were taxed and laws were even made dictating certain days when pins could be sold. Homemakers saved their extra coins all year so that they could purchase pins on the appointed days. This came to be known as “pin money”, a term still used to mean funds for incidental expenses. (How many are familiar with the phrase “pin money”?)

It would seem that pin-making would be an easier process than needle-making, but one small difference made the process more difficult—the pin head. While today’s sewing pins are made of one piece of metal, early pins had a pin shank and a separate pin head. The pin head was a wire that had to be coiled around the shank by hand. Just as with needle-making, making pins was a dangerous profession. The sharpening process caused small pieces of metal to be air-borne and they could be breathed in by workers.

Early pin-making was an industry that heightened Great Britain's economy as hundreds of thousands of pins were exported all over the world. France also became a center of pin-making. As you would expect, the Paris fashion houses used thousands of pins for dress-making. In early America, inmates and residents of poor-houses were employed to do the monotonous work of pin-making. When New York physician John Howe observed the residents of Bellevue Alms House making pins, he invented a pin-making machine in 1830. Packaging of the pins was still done by hand until Samuel Slocum invented a machine to stick the pins into paper in neat rows. The two men joined hands to become the American Pin Company of Waterbury, Connecticut. In 1834, a man named Walter Hunt came up with the idea for the safety pin. Unfortunately, to pay off a debt, Mr. Hunt sold his patent for the safety pin for just \$400.00, missing the opportunity to make a fortune on his hugely popular invention.

Since early pins were so valuable, women went to great lengths so as not to lose them. Enter the pin cushion! Early housewives would cherish putting a pin cushion in her parlor to show off her collection of pins. Victorian women would often have a variety of pin cushions, called pin pillows or pin poppets, in the shapes of fruit, vegetables, dolls or fans. The most popular pin cushion was the tomato.

The idea of a tomato pin cushion dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century when it was a popular tradition for a new home-owner to place a tomato on the mantle to invite prosperity. Since tomatoes were expensive and not always in season, fabric tomatoes stuffed with sand or sawdust became a good substitute. Eventually these fabric tomatoes would be used as pin cushions. A strawberry filled with emery was added so a seamstress could run her pins and needles through it. This would remove the burrs, thereby cleaning and sharpening her supplies. The popularity of this little tomato pin cushion has endured and is still the favorite style today. Perhaps you remember your mother or grandmother having a little tomato and perhaps you still use this little tool.

Does the Bible talk about pins? No, but if we think about the function of pins, we can discuss some Bible concepts. Certainly, people in Bible times would have

used some early type of a pin to hold their clothing together. Before buttons, snaps or zippers, using pins to hold clothing together was common practice. Even today, certain groups use pins as clothing fasteners. I am originally from Wisconsin, and there are large groups of Amish who lived in areas around me. I have seen first-hand how the Amish avoid using “show-y” fasteners such as buttons or zippers. Clothing for men may use hooks-and-eyes, like on trousers, but the women primarily use straight pins to hold clothing together, even to hold their bonnets onto their heads. It always appeared interesting to me as I imagine you might get pricked multiple times throughout a busy work-day.

The function of a pin is to hold two pieces together to make it more functional. Two pieces of clothing to make it wearable. Two pieces of fabric to make it sewable. So, too, the Scriptures tell us that when we join together as believers, God is able to use us more effectively. Consider these verses:

Hebrews 10:24-25 “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Ephesians 4:16 “From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Romans 12:4-5 “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

Romans 15:5-6 “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 3:9 “9 For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

Psalms 133:1 “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.”

3 John 1:8 “so . . . we may be fellow workers for the truth.”

Colossians 2:19 “from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together . . . grows with a growth that is from God.”

The Scripture teaches us to join together with other believers. Our fellowship and our work with one another strengthen each of us individually and makes us more functional as the body of Christ.

This month as you sew, take a few minutes to consider the history of the lowly pin. A simple object used for centuries in a very important way. Consider with whom and with what you are joining your life. Are you regularly meeting with other believers? Are you strengthening your own life and the body of Christ by your actions, habits and activities? Are the things you do “prickly” to others in any way? Do you have some “burrs” to remove? Do you need to clean and sharpen your life by running it through the emery of God’s Word?

God delights in our joining together. Hold fast to one another and do God’s work.