**Threads of Hope Sewing Devotion 18**

Anyone that sews is familiar with the axiom “Measure twice, cut once”. It might not be pleasant to take that extra minute to measure again but it can prevent you from making a costly and time-consuming mistake. How did we come by some of our modern measurement devices? Today we are going to look at one of them we use most every time we sew--the lowly measuring tape.

People have been measuring things since well before Jesus’s day. Length was often measured by a finger, a hand, or a forearm. A common measurement in Bible times was the cubit, the length between the elbow and the hand, about 18 inches. Other length measurements included in the Scripture are the finger (3/4 inch), the span (9 inches), the reed (11 feet), the fathom (6 feet), the furlong (1/8 mile), the stadion (607 feet) and the journeys—a day’s journey being 20 miles and a Sabbath day’s journey which was only ½ mile. Of course, other standards for weight and liquid and dry measures are also included in the Bible.

But when it comes to garment construction, the standardized tape measure is a relatively new invention. Early Romans used a precursor in the form of leather strips with marked lengths. Much later, the fashion world employed another early form of tape measure made of paper. A tailor would use a strip of paper to wrap around a person and then make coded notches for chest, waist, hips, inseam, etc. The notch code system could be used by workers who were unable to read. Each notched paper strip would be marked with the measured person’s name, then folded and saved for their individual future garments.

In 1847, Alexis Lavigne, a French tailor to royalty, invented the first “sewing tape”. His cloth tape was marked with standard measurements of inches and centimeters. Mr. Lavigne’s precision measuring tape allowed tailors to standardize their entire industry. It also allowed basic home seamstresses to move beyond basic sewing repairs and into the area of fitted garments since his measuring tape could easily wrap around the body for exact measurement.

Early measuring tapes were made of cloth or silk but had the complication of being stretchy, thus skewing the measurements over time. During the early 1900’s, manufacturers experimented with making measuring tapes from celluloid or synthetic plastics. Advertisers for products like soap and beauty products added their logos to make measuring tapes a gift to their customers. By the middle of the century, retractable measuring tapes in decorative cases became the rage. Some were combined with a pin cushion and tended to be used more as a collectible and less for actual sewing. (see some pictures of these fancy tapes). Retractable measuring tapes fell out of use as the act of pulling them out of the case caused the tape to stretch and become inaccurate.

Today, measuring tapes range from simple to expensive. Professional measuring tapes are made from fiberglass which never stretches. Simpler tapes are manufactured from vinyl and are marked with Imperial Measurements of inches, divided into eighths or sixteenths, and Metric markings of centimeters and millimeters. A standard measuring tape is 60 inches long with a width of 5/8 inches, the measurement of most seam allowances.

An interesting aside from the tailor’s measuring tape is the invention of the modern builder’s retractable measuring tape. When hoop skirts fell out of fashion during the late 1800’s, a manufacturer named James Chesterman was stuck with huge quantities of the flat wire that was used for the hoops. He invented and patented a retractable spring measuring tape with marked measurements for the construction industry.

The Bible has some things to say about measuring. God gave the Israelites specific measurements for building the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple. The Prophet Zechariah saw a vision of a man with a measuring line heading to Jerusalem to measure its dimensions. In the New Testament, John is asked to measure Jerusalem as well. The Old Testament books of Deuteronomy and Proverbs give warnings against being deceitful by using different standards of measures to defraud others.

The most important verses regarding measurement in the Bible pertain to God Himself and the inability we have to measure of what He has made. The Prophet Isaiah asks, “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?” (Isaiah 40:12) and Jeremiah echoes that thought in a similar statement by saying, “If only the heavens above could be measured . . .” (Jeremiah 31:37) Both prophets conclude that we are incapable of measuring the majesty of God’s creation.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul challenges us with the seemingly impossible task of measuring God’s abundance and faithfulness. Listen to these verses from Ephesians:

“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

And again, from Ephesians, “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13) Did you catch the measurements we can use to measure the fullness of God? Width, length, height and depth. That’s four dimensions. We live in a three-dimensional world, but God’s fullness is so much more than we can imagine—its four-dimensional, at least!

One final thought before we exhaust measuring. It pertains to how we measure others. Luke 6:38 tells us, “Give and it will be given to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” That’s a great promise and a serious warning about giving. God says He will be generous to us if we employ that same measuring tape of generosity to others.

This month as you sew, and measure, think about our awesome God. His amazing creation of earth and sky cannot be measured by our inadequate standards. And yet, He invites us to experience the measure of His fullness as we mature in our spiritual lives. Be careful about how you are “measuring up” others. When we use a gracious and generous measuring tape with others, God says He will use that same measure for us, and heap on so much added goodness, we won’t be able to contain it. Use your physical measuring tape to sew up some items to bless others and use your spiritual measuring tape to glorify God with your actions of giving and grace.

