Lift Ticket
5 Week Challenge
Week 4: Equipment

Day 1

Devotional Thought:
I played baseball when I was growing up. I always found it funny that the kids with the coolest gear, the newest bat, or brand new batting gloves, cleats, whatever, often times were not very good players. It was like all style and no substance when it came to their game. When Paul talks about spiritual gifts in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, he makes it clear that some people have more gifts than others. Some have what we would consider more enviable gifts. At the end of the day, it comes down to who uses their gifts for the "common good" meaning the benefit of others. You see it didn't matter to the team as a whole who had the best bat, it mattered who could get hits regardless of how cool their bat was. We often fall into this trap of believing that we either don't have any spiritual gifts or that ours aren't really important. People with gifts of leadership and teaching often get all the publicity, while people with gifts of encouragement and generosity go unnoticed. Paul talks about this quite a bit in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul says that he not only doesn't want anyone to be ignorant of what gifts they've been given (1 Corinthians 12:1), but that he wants them to understand how indispensable they are to the "common good." Paul uses the metaphor of the human body in a brilliant way to give us a good picture of how important each of us are to the whole. A team metaphor works as well. The best pitcher in the world can't win a ball game without a catcher or a left fielder. Every part is important, the pitcher may get the "win" on his record, may win awards and make more money, but not without the contribution of every other member of the team. Paul says, "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?" In other words, you were created as you are for a specific purpose that works together in cohesion with other believers for the "common good." So what happens when we either don't know what we are equipped to do, or we simply don't use the gifts we've been given? It's not just you that misses out! The whole church misses out. When you don't play your part, when you don't get off the bench the whole team suffers. It doesn't matter how "glamorous" or "ordinary" you perceive your gifts to be, they are significant and needed. If you are a follower of Jesus, you were given a spiritual gift(s) the moment the spirit came and took up residence in your life.

Old Question- "Do I have anything to contribute to the good of others?"

New Question- "How can I utilize the gifts I've been given to serve God and other people?"

<u>Verse to remember: 1 Corinthians 12:4-6</u>
"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men"

Day 2

Devotional Thought:
When I was a freshman in college, I decided that I needed to do an internship at a church during the summer when school was out. I knew I wanted to be a pastor, and I knew I needed to gain some experience beyond just sitting in a classroom and talking about ministry. So I talked to someone I knew who was working as a Children's pastor at a church out in the middle of nowhere about 4 hours away from my home town. The truth is I didn't want to go there. I wanted to go back to the church I grew up in and work, but I assumed that wasn't what God wanted me to do. It couldn't be okay with God for me to do something I wanted to do? Surely God had other plans that couldn't possibly line up with my desires? I just assumed that whatever I wanted or desired probably wasn't right. Have you ever felt that way? Why do we think this way? I think it's a lack of trust. We don't trust ourselves, and mostly we don't trust God. I can say that for myself, at least. When you really examine it, it sounds ridiculous. I wanted to be a pastor. I wanted to gain experience in order to be a better pastor. I wanted to serve in a church in order to accomplish that, and a good church at that. What part of any of that could be deemed as "outside of God's will?" Yet, that's what I believed because I didn't trust my own desires at all. Ultimately though, it was a reflection of how I viewed God. I really believed that God was out to spoil my fun or keep me from ever enjoying myself. I believed God was in the business of crushing people's dreams, not making them come true. Wouldn't it make sense that if our dreams are in alignment with God's purpose then He would be in the business of making them come true? So what are your dreams? Are they consistent with the purpose of God? What's keeping you from chasing after them?

Old Question: "What will God make me do if I choose to submit to His will?"

New Question: "What will God allow me to do if I choose to submit to His will?"

<u>Verse to Remember: Psalm 37:4</u>
"Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of your heart."

Day 3:

Devotional Thought:
I have almost no math skills. I took some form of algebra every year in school from 7th grade through 10th grade. I was finally allowed to move onto Geometry as a junior in high school after getting a solid C in algebra 1. I hated Geometry even more. I wrapped up my senior year by taking "business math," which was basically adding and subtracting, much more my speed. It didn't matter how hard I worked or didn't work at math, I just wasn't ever going to be good at it. My brain does not have the ability (or the desire) to process equations, percentages, fractions, or long division. I could have really focused on that weakness and gotten a tutor, taken summer school, gone to college, and taken more math classes. I chose not to do any of that and I'm actually glad I didn't. I used to get really frustrated in Algebra class and raise my hand and ask, "When will we ever use this in real life?" That question never went over well with the teachers, but they also never gave me an answer that made any sense. Now, I'm well aware that there are many real life uses for mathematics. Yet, I'm still very glad I didn't spend any more of my life focusing on trying to get better at something I'm weak at. I think it's much more important to focus on our strengths; to work on refining the things we are able to do, as opposed to the things we aren't able to do. If you believe that God created you, knit you together, formed you they way you are, and gave you specific abilities and talents, doesn't it make sense to spend your time leveraging them. The alternative is to try to get better at things God didn't give you natural abilities in. As I examine the Bible, it seems quite often that God used people's talents and abilities for His purposes. Peter's boldness when leveraged for founding the church was quite handy. Paul's eloquence and intellect, when it came to debating the philosophers of his day, were useful abilities. So what have you always been good at? What are your natural abilities and talents? How are you refining them? How can you leverage your abilities for God's purpose?

Old Question: "How can I fix my weaknesses?"

New Question: "How can I leverage my strengths?"

<u>Verse to Remember: Psalm 139:13</u> "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb."

Day 4

Devotional Thought:
How would you describe your personality? What characteristics define your personality? If you've ever taken a personality test, you probably have some language or terms to define your personality. If not, you may be relying on what you think or other people have told you. Have you ever wondered why God created us with so many different personality types? Here's the thing, none of us are exactly the same either. None of us can be defined or fit nicely into a category or definition, can we? We may have a similar personality or personality type that is similar to others, but no two people have the exact same personality anymore than two people have the same fingerprint. Why? I think it goes back to the same reason we all are given different gifts, passions, and abilities. Our God is a creative God! He doesn't have a boring bone in His body. All you have to do is look around at the rest of creation to figure that out. There are over 50,000 different kinds of beetles on this earth. That's just one subset of bugs! We are still discovering different kinds of bugs and fish. God could have easily made one fish and then made all the rest to look just like that one and called them "fish." The same is true of us, physically, spiritually, and mentally. We are unique. Have you ever met anyone who failed to embrace their uniqueness? Have you ever met someone who didn't like who they were so they tried to be someone they weren't? An introvert who tries to be the class clown is doomed for embarrassment, simply because they aren't wired that way. Many people are not created to thrive in a working environment where they spend most of their time behind a desk. Their personality won't allow it. Many people aren't created to have 5 or 6 children; their personality doesn't fit that kind of lifestyle. When you put yourself in environments where your personality is leveraged, but is stifled, you are setting yourself up for frustration. As I read the Bible, there are dozens of different personality types represented. The cool thing is God used all of them. Jeremiah was very melancholy. David was very reflective and deep. Esau was hyperactive and "outdoorsy." Ruth was loyal and composed. Martha was a "type A." Paul was intellectual. The list goes on and on. The point is God can use all types to accomplish His purpose.

Old Question: "Can I change my personality to accommodate circumstances?"

New Question: "Will these circumstances accommodate my personality?"

<u>Verse to Remember: Proverbs 20:5</u> "The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out."

Day 5

Devotional Thought:
It was Soren Kierkegaard that said, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it can only be lived forward." He was right, wasn't he? I think so. Looking back on my life, I can see how God has leveraged my good decisions, my bad decisions, the things I didn't get to decide on, and everything else in between to prepare me for today. I can say that now, but I couldn't always say that by any stretch of the imagination. There have been many times in my life where I found myself in circumstances that in no way appeared to be redeemable. I have asked God, "why are you letting this happen to me," more times than I can count and most of the time I didn't feel like I got an answer from God at all. Looking back I can say, God has answered some of those questions by showing me (sometimes years later) how my past experience can be used for my benefit or (most often) the benefit of others. When my wife had a miscarriage I couldn't understand how that could ever be redeemed or used for good. After counseling and just praying with or for dozens of couples who have gone through the same thing, I understand. The truth is I'm very impatient so I don't like to wait for answers. I don't prefer to wait to understand. I want to get it now or I don't want to go through this! I suspect most of us are like that. Let's be honest though, have you ever gone into a circumstance knowing full well that some, if not all, of your past experiences will come to bare in that moment? Let me ask it this way. If you were on a 747 jet flying across the country at 28,000 feet and you had engine failure, what kind of pilot would you prefer to have flying the plane: A pilot that had never experienced engine failure before? Or one that had? That's an easy answer, you want the pilot who has been there, done that, right? There is a lot of benefit to accumulating "been there, done that" moments or circumstances in your life, maybe not for your own benefit, but for the benefit of others. Honestly, this perspective doesn't necessarily make tough circumstances any easier to go through, but it does give us hope and confidence that God will not let any experience we have be wasted. All things are not good. But God can and does work all things for the good.

Old Question: "Why did God let that happen to me?"

New Question: "How can God redeem what happened to me?"

<u>Verse to Remember: Romans 8:28</u> "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."