Taking Advantage of God’s Grace

Introduction: Len Bias played basketball for the University of Maryland from 1982-1986. At 6-8 210 lbs. he was one of the most physically gifted athletes ever to play college basketball. He was named an All-American twice and the ACC Athlete of the Year his senior year and was ultimately drafted second in the 1986 NBA draft by the Boston Celtics. At this point you might be thinking why have I never heard of this guy? Because unfortunately on the night after the draft, Len Bias went back to Maryland to celebrate with his friends. During the party he overdosed on cocaine and died at 8:55 AM.

* What types of emotions does this story bring out? Sadness, regret, sympathy? For me it also brings out anger
  + The God given ability that this young man was given was taken because of one bad decision
  + How different his life would have been if he had just been smarter with his decisions. All he had to do was leave the cocaine alone.
* This is not a sermon about drugs, or bad decisions, or even basketball. This is a sermon about grace and how we can find ourselves in a similar spiritual situation to Len Bias.

What is grace?

* There is a huge range of teachings and doctrines surrounding the grace of God; from the idea that our works can get us into heaven completely apart from grace to the idea that grace will cover all sins regardless of repentance
  + I’m afraid that we may neglect the power and importance of grace because we try so hard to convey to others the Law that God expects us to follow
* The basis of God’s grace is His love for mankind
  + Titus 2:11-14 - [***11***](http://biblehub.com/titus/2-11.htm) *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,*[***12***](http://biblehub.com/titus/2-12.htm) *instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,*[***13***](http://biblehub.com/titus/2-13.htm) *looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,*[***14***](http://biblehub.com/titus/2-14.htm) *who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*
  + 2 Timothy 1:8-11 -  [***8***](http://biblehub.com/2_timothy/1-8.htm) *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,*[***9***](http://biblehub.com/2_timothy/1-9.htm) *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,*[***10***](http://biblehub.com/2_timothy/1-10.htm) *but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,*[***11***](http://biblehub.com/2_timothy/1-11.htm) *for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.*
* The gift of grace must be completely voluntary, not something that is forced
  + Many times we hear of lavish gifts or donations given by high profile people that initially look to be very generous, only to find out that the motivation behind the gifts was for their own personal gain.
  + The death of Jesus was completely for us. It was not forced and because God gains nothing from our service we cannot expect to earn His approval.
  + Rom. 11:6 - [***6***](http://biblehub.com/romans/11-6.htm) *But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.*

How we do we take advantage of this grace? There are two ways:

We can try and take advantage of it in the sense that we try to get away with things or do as much wrong as we can while still being God’s child.

* Law of grace overcomes forsaking commandments
* Rom. 5:20-21 - [***20***](http://biblehub.com/romans/5-20.htm) *The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,*[***21***](http://biblehub.com/romans/5-21.htm) *so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
* Rom. 6:1-7 - [***1***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-1.htm) *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?*[***2***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-2.htm) *May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*[***3***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-3.htm) *Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?*[***4***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-4.htm) *Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*[***5***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-5.htm) *For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,*[***6***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-6.htm) *knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;*[***7***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-7.htm) *for he who has died is freed from sin.*
* Rom. 6:12-15 - [***12***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-12.htm) *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,*[***13***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-13.htm) *and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*[***14***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-14.htm) *For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.* [***15***](http://biblehub.com/romans/6-15.htm) *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!*
* It is very clear where Paul stands on sin and grace: The grace of God is not an excuse for sin.

The other way that we can choose to take advantage of God’s grace is by accepting it and doing everything in our power to do His will. Because of the tremendous grace given to us we should be compelled to remove sin from our lives.

* Example of Ezra: In Ezra 9 he finds out that the children of Israel have completely ignored God’s commands regarding marriage to other nations. They had married into idolatrous nations and in so doing had brought idolatry into God’s nation
  + Ezra 9:5-15 - [***5***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-5.htm) *But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God;*[***6***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-6.htm) *and I said, “O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens.*[***7***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-7.htm) *“Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities we, our kings and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, as it is this day.*[***8***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-8.htm) *“But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage.*[***9***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-9.htm) *“For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended loving kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.* [***10***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-10.htm) *“Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments,*[***11***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-11.htm) *which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end and with their impurity.*[***12***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-12.htm) *‘So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.’*[***13***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-13.htm) *“After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us an escaped remnant as this,*[***14***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-14.htm) *shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape?*[***15***](http://biblehub.com/ezra/9-15.htm) *“O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this.”*
  + Have you ever been so embarrassed by your actions that you didn’t even want to look to God? This is how Ezra felt, and he didn’t just throw up his hands and say “You guys messed up but God is so graceful that He is going to overlook this.” Humility was at the heart of his message, continuing in sin while relying on grace is arrogance.
  + This is very similar to the prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18:13-14 - [***13***](http://biblehub.com/luke/18-13.htm) *“But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’*[***14***](http://biblehub.com/luke/18-14.htm) *“I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*
* We have been given everything that we need to succeed by the grace of God
  + Are you going to throw that gift away because you can’t give something up in your life?
  + The story of the rich young ruler may evoke similar emotions as the story of Len Bias
  + Mark 10:17-22 - [***17***](http://biblehub.com/mark/10-17.htm) *As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*[***18***](http://biblehub.com/mark/10-18.htm) *And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.*[***19***](http://biblehub.com/mark/10-19.htm) *“You know the commandments, ‘DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.’”*[***20***](http://biblehub.com/mark/10-20.htm) *And he said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.”*[***21***](http://biblehub.com/mark/10-21.htm) *Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”*[***22***](http://biblehub.com/mark/10-22.htm) *But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.*
  + Had the grace of God failed this man? Absolutely not, he failed to take advantage of it.
  + When we fail we must make the necessary changes
* The grace of God is so wonderful and powerful it is hard for us to comprehend. The apostle Paul mentions grace over 100 times in his books alone. Our service to Him needs to reflect our gratitude for the precious gift of His Son who raised us from the dead. We serve a God who saved us utterly and completely by His grace and our lives need to be a reflection of that.

Eph. 2:4-10 - [***4***](http://biblehub.com/ephesians/2-4.htm) *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,*[***5***](http://biblehub.com/ephesians/2-5.htm) *even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*[***6***](http://biblehub.com/ephesians/2-6.htm) *and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*[***7***](http://biblehub.com/ephesians/2-7.htm) *so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*[***8***](http://biblehub.com/ephesians/2-8.htm) *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;*[***9***](http://biblehub.com/ephesians/2-9.htm) *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*[***10***](http://biblehub.com/ephesians/2-10.htm) *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*