



Week 1

Attitude

The day was already uncomfortably hot when Digby woke up. All he wanted to do was hide in the cool, dark basement and play video games all day, but his dad said, "I'm going to need your help pulling weeds this morning, Digby." Digby groaned. Pulling weeds was DEFINITELY going to cut into his video game time.

After an entire morning of pulling weeds under the hot sun (which should have only taken an hour, but Digby spent most of the time complaining instead of working) it was time for lunch after which Digby was looking forward to some serious video game action.

"No video games, Dig," said his dad. "Soccer practice." Digby had to reach down pretty deep to find a groan big enough to show his frustration.

Have you guys ever been in a situation like this? You really want to do something you enjoy, but you're stuck doing something else?

At practice Coach had the team run sprints for ten minutes. Digby clomped along at the back of the group, grumbling the whole time. He noticed his friend, George, all the way up at the front of the group. George was laughing and having a great time, which made Digby feel even worse... at first. But Digby remembered something that George had told him once, "You can't always do what you enjoy, but you CAN always enjoy what you're doing."

Digby had always thought that sounded silly. You couldn't choose to be happy... could you? Was that what George had meant? That happiness is a choice?

Digby realized that he almost never chose to be happy. He usually just complained and groaned. Well, he thought, there was still time to choose happiness. Digby stopped grumbling, picked up his feet, and ran to the head of the group beside George, and when practice finally ended, he was actually a little disappointed. But he chose to be happy anyway.

Let's pray and ask God to help us to always choose to have a good attitude and to be happy no matter what our circumstances are.

Proverbs 17:22 "A cheerful heart makes you healthy. But a broken spirit dries you up." (NIRV)



Week 2

Respect

Hester was very popular. She was friends with all of the coolest kids in the neighborhood. Even the uncool kids, like her next-door neighbor Doris, wanted to be her friend.

One afternoon before soccer practice, Hester was loading her equipment bag into the car when Doris ran over. Hester rolled her eyes and groaned.

"Hey, Hester!" Doris said. "I was just thinking that, since we're on the same soccer team, we should carpool! My mom can drive us this time and your mom can drive us next time!"

Hester didn't want to be mean, but she was also getting tired of constantly dodging Doris, so she decided to be honest. "Look, Doris. I don't think it's a good idea for us to be friends. I'm in the popular group and you're not. If someone saw us together, I wouldn't be in the popular group anymore. Sorry."

Doris didn't say anything, but Hester could tell she was hurt. The truth hurts. That was the saying, right? Hester decided it was for the best.

Do you think Hester did the right thing? How would you have handled this situation?

After a very awkward and uncomfortable practice during which Doris barely even looked in Hester's direction, Hester's mom, who was usually waiting in the parking lot at the end of each practice, was nowhere in sight. One by one the other players left with their parents and Hester got more and more anxious. Finally, she was all alone... with Doris.

As Doris's mom pulled into the parking lot, Doris walked over to Hester. "Need a ride?" Doris asked. Hester couldn't believe it. "Really? After what I said to you earlier?" "You really hurt my feelings, Hester. And if you think being popular is more important than being kind, well that's your choice. But I choose to be kind. No matter what." After that, Hester changed the way she treated people. She stopped worrying about being popular and started focusing on being kind.

Let's ask God to help us remember to be kind to everyone, no matter what.

Luke 6:31 "Do to others as you would like them to do to you." (NLT)



Week 3

Humility

Orin was very excited about playing soccer. He was sure he would be the greatest goalie in the league. After all, he had ten eyes that could see in any direction. What could possibly get past him?

"You know," Orin said to his friend and teammate, Marvin, "it's just a matter of natural talent. Some of us are just born great. Maybe if you practice really hard, Marvin, you can be a great goalie like me." Marvin thought that sounded like a good idea, so he went off to practice.

Orin was so convinced that he was going to be a great goalie that he started telling anyone who would listen about how he would one day be rich and famous.

"I'll probably start with a mansion and a yacht, but once my shoe endorsement takes off, I'll treat myself and buy my own island. Maybe New Zealand..."

While Orin was busy bragging about how great he was, his team was busy practicing to make sure they were ready for their upcoming game.

Our verse says that "pride leads to disgrace." Have you ever had an experience like that?

When game day arrived, Orin was ready. Well, he thought he was ready. As it turned out, having ten eyes doesn't make you a better goalie, but it lets you get a really good look at the ball as it zooms past you.

During the first time out, Orin sat down on the bench next to Marvin.

"You know, Marvin, I thought I would be a natural goalie, but I just can't seem to get to the ball fast enough. I really should have practiced more."

Marvin, who HAD been practicing, took over as goalie for the rest of the game. Orin was really impressed with Marvin's skills.

"Marvin!" said Orin after the game. "You were amazing! Do you think you could help me practice?"

Marvin thought that sounded like a good idea.

Let's always remember to ask God to keep us humble and to not let our pride take over our hearts.

Proverbs 11:2 "Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." (NLT)



Week 4

Love

Doris was feeling conflicted.

Her soccer team had just won their first soccer game of the summer and she was very excited. The whole team was celebrating. They were jumping up and down and hugging each other... It was a wonderful feeling.

But when Doris looked over at the other team's bench, they weren't celebrating. They looked miserable. And that made something inside Doris's stomach twitch.

Doris always tried to choose kindness, but celebrating while the other team was so sad seemed mean. She knew that her team had worked hard and deserved to celebrate their victory, but wasn't there some way that everyone could celebrate together?

The Bible tells us to "be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep." That's a very tricky thing when you're playing a game, isn't it? How do we celebrate winning when it means that someone else has to lose?

How do we suffer a loss when someone else is celebrating a victory?

The Bible wants us to love each other, and sometimes that means putting aside our own feelings so that others don't feel so alone, which isn't always easy. Doris really wanted to

celebrate her win, but she also wanted to make sure the other team didn't feel too bad about losing.

What advice would you give to Doris?

When we pray, let's ask God to give us guidance when we aren't sure how to show love to others.

Romans 12:15 "Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep." (NLT)



Week 5

Honesty

Marvin was in trouble. As one of the team's goalies, he was responsible for taking the nets down after each practice and placing them in the trunk of Coach's car, but he had forgotten to do that and by the time he remembered, it was getting dark. He would have to wait until morning.

When he got to the soccer field the next morning, his stomach immediately rolled up into a tiny ball. The nets were gone! What was he going to do?!

So, what do you think Marvin should do? What would YOU do?

Marvin's first thought was to come up with a story that would keep him from getting in trouble. Maybe he could pin this on Orin, the team's other goalie. Maybe he could pretend that he DID take down the nets, that he DID put them in Coach's car, and he DIDN'T know how they could have gone missing. Maybe he could say that they were stolen by aliens or soccer-playing robots.

But Marvin knew that he had to do the right thing. So, he called Coach, ready to tell the truth. When Coach answered, Marvin said, "Coach, I have to tell you something."

"About what?" asked Coach.

With a knot in his stomach, Marvin explained what had happened and offered to replace the nets. It would take all of the money he had saved up and probably all of his allowance for the next year, but he would pay for the nets he had lost. As he told Coach the truth, the knot in his stomach untied itself. He felt free, light as a feather.

"Marvin, everything is fine," Coach said. "Orin took the nets down before he left."

Marvin didn't know what to say. He had expected Coach to get angry. He had expected to get kicked off the team. He certainly hadn't expected this.

"And Marvin?" "Yeah, Coach?" "Thank you for telling me the truth."

Telling the truth can be hard, especially when it means we'll get into trouble. But telling the truth is always the right thing to do. When we pray, let's ask God to help us to always be honest.

John 8:32 "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (NLT)



Week 6

Cooperation

Roberta was the best player on the team, depending on who you asked. She could run faster and kick farther and dodge and spin and slide better than anyone. The only thing she couldn't do was pass. But, as there was no one on her team as good as her, why would she ever need to pass the ball to anyone else?

After each game Roberta was ready with a long list of notes for her teammates: how to pass to her better, how to keep the other team out of her way, where to stand when she was taking a shot on the goal... Normally, she would let Coach give notes, but he wasn't the one out on the field. He didn't see the action like she saw it.

The frustrating thing was that the team didn't seem to understand Roberta's instructions. They were supposed to pass the ball to her whenever it came to them, but they would always run down the field with it or pass to someone else. If they would only listen to her and stay out of her way, they would win every game. "I guess some people just don't know how to work as a team," she would say to herself.

Our verse today mentions success. What Roberta didn't understand is that success isn't about winning games, it's about learning to live and work alongside other people. Good teamwork is about realizing that other people are just as important as you are. When we pray, don't forget to ask God to help you be a good teammate to everyone in your life.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 "Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed."



Week 7

Confidence

It was the first week of soccer practice and George was very nervous. He was normally very brave, climbing tall trees, scooping up icky bugs, crawling through stinky muck... But something about playing on a soccer team made him feel like hiding under a rock.

What if he messed up? What if he kicked the ball the wrong way? What if the other players got mad at him? What if the coach told him he wasn't good enough? George didn't mind climbing trees and playing with bugs and crawling around in the mud because it was just him on his own. There was no team to let down.

Have any of you ever felt like George? Nervous about messing up? Afraid to let your team down?

Our verse says, "The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear." The Lord, God, knows what he's doing. He put you all here for a very special reason. Some of you might be here to run fast and score points. Some of you might be here to block the goal. But some of you might be here for reasons that have nothing to do with soccer. A lot of the time, God leads us into situations so that we can learn and sometimes that means making mistakes. We can learn more from our failures than we can from our successes.

George knew that God was on his side, win or lose. He was still nervous, but he joined his team and did his best anyway. Knowing that God was with him gave him the confidence he needed to get out on the field and be there for his team.

Let's pray and ask God to give us confidence to do our best, win or lose.

Hebrews 13:6 "So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?'" (NLT)



Week 8

Perseverance

Nelly had never played soccer before. She had read all about it, though, and knew all of the rules. It was simple enough: run back and forth, don't touch the ball with your hands... Simple.

On the first day of practice Nelly realized that, even though soccer had seemed simple on the pages of a book, in real life it was very complicated. She didn't realize how exhausting running back and forth could be! And every time someone kicked the ball into the air, she couldn't help but reach her arms up to catch it. By the end of that first practice, she was ready to give up. It was too hard.

Do any of you ever feel like giving up when things get hard?

When practice was over Nelly was so frustrated that she didn't talk to anyone. She just jumped on her skateboard and zoomed off down the sidewalk. As she rolled along, steering around cracks and acorns and stones, she remembered the summer before, when she had first gotten her skateboard. She could hardly stay on the board at first because it kept darting backward and forward under her feet. No matter what she did, she always seemed to end up on the ground.

But she hadn't given up. She'd stuck with it. She learned to keep her balance and then she learned to steer the board by leaning from side to side. And now it was easy. Maybe soccer would be the same way.

God wants us all to do our best. That means getting up when we fall down.

Let's ask God to give us patience to try our hardest, even when we want to quit.

Matthew 24:13 "But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved." (NIRV)