

Session 2: Reason

The first pillar. Treating those in our care as rational creatures who can understand the why.

Welcome back

Last week we named the wall and laid the foundation. Today we sit with the first of Bosco's three pillars: **Reason** (*ragione*). Treating the people in our care as rational creatures. Explaining the why. Not commanding from the lectern.

The contract is unchanged: one specific moment from your week, every week.

Opening prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

St. John Bosco, you took the hardest cases and formed them into men. Help us to take the souls God has placed under our care, our wives, our children, the men we sponsor, and form them with the same patience, the same reason, the same love that you used. Teach us to be present before we are productive, to be patient before we are pleased, and to lead with our hearts before we lead with our authority. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. John Bosco, ora pro nobis.

Today's scene

It is 7:45am Tuesday. Your 9-year-old can't find his shoes for school. You told him last night to put them by the door. He didn't. You said it twice. He didn't. Now he's frantic, your 4-year-old is melting down because nobody is making her oatmeal, your wife is in the shower, and the bus comes in 18 minutes.

You snap: "Figure it out." You walk away.

Five minutes later you find his shoes under the couch. He's crying. The bus is here. He runs out the door without breakfast. You stand in the kitchen feeling the heat in your chest, and you know exactly what you did. You used force where you could have used reason. You commanded where you could have explained. Or just helped.

That is the moment. That is what Bosco is about to give us words for.

Today's reading

From Don Bosco's The Preventive System in the Education of the Young, 1877, Section II: Application of the System.

The practice of this system rests entirely on the words of St. Paul, who says: *Charitas benigna est, patiens est; omnia suffert, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet*. "Charity is kind and patient; she suffers all things, she hopes all things, and she endures every burden." For this reason, only a Christian can successfully apply the Preventive System. Reason and Religion are the instruments the educator must constantly make use of; he must teach them, and he must himself practice them, if he wishes to be obeyed and to attain his end.

The Rector, therefore, must be consecrated to the boys in his care. He must never take on commitments that pull him away from his duty. On the contrary, he must always be with his students whenever they are not necessarily occupied with some task, except when they are duly being looked after by others.

The teachers, the masters of trade, and the assistants must be of known moral character. Let them study to avoid, as they would the plague, every sort of particular affection or friendship with the students, and let them remember that the moral ruin of even one boy can compromise an entire educational institute. See to it that the students are never alone. As far as possible, the assistants should precede them to the place where they are to gather; they should stay with them until others have taken over; they should never leave them with nothing to do.

A note on one phrase

When Bosco says to avoid “every sort of particular affection or friendship” like the plague, he isn’t telling us to keep the people in our care at arm’s length. He built his whole system on love. The word doing the work is *particular*. He’s warning against the favorite: singling one person out for an exclusive, private bond the others don’t get. The fix isn’t less affection. It’s wider affection, the kind a father owes every child at the table, not just the one who’s easiest to love. Read that way, the line sits naturally beside the one right after it: favoritism is exactly how “the moral ruin of even one boy” begins.

The concept in plain language

Reason isn’t just “explaining yourself.” It’s the whole posture of treating the person in front of you as a rational creature who can understand. Your kid. Your wife. The man you’re sponsoring. They have a mind. They have a heart. They can follow you if you give them the why. They will fight you if you only give them the command. Bosco names this as the first pillar because the other two (Religion, Loving-kindness) collapse without it.

Discussion questions

1. Bosco’s word for the first pillar is *ragione*. Not just “logic,” not just “explanation,” but the whole posture of treating the person in front of you as a rational creature who can understand. What does that look like in practice with your kid? With your wife? With the man you’re sponsoring?
 2. Bosco insists the educator must always be *with* his students. Where in your week are you actually present with the people you’re leading, and where are you only over them or away from them?
 3. When you give a command without explaining the why, what’s the cost? When you do explain, what does it open up?
 4. Father Dalimata’s question from last week, applied this time to Reason: do you experience God the Father as a Father who reasons with you, who explains, who invites your understanding? Or as one who commands and expects compliance? Where does that image come from?
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The deeper theological move

God is a Father who reasons with us. The whole arc of scripture is God explaining: covenants, prophets, the Incarnation. “Come, let us reason together,” says the Lord (Isaiah 1:18). Christ teaches with parables, not edicts. The Father who made you wants you to understand, not just obey.

The men around this table who experienced their fathers as arbitrary, as commanding without explanation, will tend to image God the same way. Naming Bosco’s first pillar today is also naming the kind of Father God actually is.

Check-in: how did last week’s commitment land?

Last week each of us committed to noticing a Repressive default this week, pausing three seconds, and trying Preventive instead. Around the table: did you catch yourself? What happened when you paused? If you didn’t catch it, what got in the way?

Live application

Name one specific moment in the last 7 days where you gave a command without explaining the why. One sentence per man. Just the moment.

Monday-morning commitment

This week, pick one specific person and one specific recurring scenario where you’ll explain the why instead of commanding. Be ready to report what happened.

My one specific person:

My one specific recurring scenario:

The why I’ll explain instead of commanding:

Closing prayer

Father, we thank you for the wisdom of your servant John Bosco, and for the brothers around this table. Send us back to our homes this morning ready to be the fathers, the husbands, and the brothers you have called us to be. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sancte Ioannes Bosco, ora pro nobis. Sancte Francisce Salesii, ora pro nobis.

The full 8-week arc, how to bring a moment, and the source translations are in the overview at <https://don-bosco.studiovellum.ai>.