

Session 5: Reason, deeper

The Reason pillar applied to the moment we most often get wrong: correction.

Welcome back

Last week was the heart of the curriculum: Loving-kindness. Today we return to Reason but go a layer deeper, into the specific terrain Bosco knew matters most. **Correction.** How we correct the people in our care, and what we do to them when we get it wrong.

Same contract. One specific moment, 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

Dinner. Wednesday night. You're tired. Your 11-year-old is the second-oldest at the table. Your 6-year-old spills milk for the second time this week, and your 11-year-old laughs.

You snap at the 11-year-old. In front of everyone. "What is **WRONG** with you? You're old enough to know better. You're supposed to be helping, not laughing at her."

He gets quiet. His face goes still. He stops eating. He doesn't say anything the rest of dinner. He carries his plate to the sink and walks to his room.

You sit there with the milk spreading across the table and a hole in your chest. You corrected him in public. You went after his character, not his behavior. You sent him away as the bad one. And the worst part: you know he's now lying on his bed wondering if you actually think there's something wrong with him.

That is the moment Bosco wrote a whole circular against.

Today's reading

From Don Bosco's 1883 circular On the Punishments to Be Inflicted in Salesian Houses, the standing instruction Bosco issued to every Salesian Rector on the spirit and method of correction.

The system in use in our schools, as you know, is the Preventive System, which consists essentially of disposing the pupils to obey not from fear or compulsion but from persuasion. In this system, all force must be excluded, and in its place, charity must be the mainspring of action.

Punishment should be your last resort. In my long career as an educator, how often this has been brought home to me. No doubt it is ten times easier to lose our patience than to control it, to threaten a boy than to persuade him. No doubt, too, it is much more gratifying to our pride to punish those who resist us than to bear with them with firm kindness.

We should, therefore, correct them with the patience of a father. Never, as far as possible, correct in public, but in private, as they say, *in camera caritatis*, apart from the others. Only in cases of preventing or remedying serious scandal would I permit public corrections or punishments.

And from the 1877 treatise, Section IV: A Word on Punishments:

Striking the student in any way, making him kneel in a painful posture, pulling his ears, and other punishments of this sort must be absolutely avoided, because they are forbidden by the civil laws, they greatly anger the young, and they humiliate the educator.

The concept in plain language

Correction isn't punishment. Bosco's word for it is *in camera caritatis*, in the chamber of charity. The work is not to make the kid suffer for what he did; the work is to form him so he can do differently next time, while keeping the relationship intact. Public correction shames. Character attacks wound. Private correction with the patience of a father forms. Same kid, same offense, three completely different outcomes depending on which one you choose under stress.

Discussion questions

1. How were YOU corrected as a kid? Pick one specific moment that still lives in you. What did it teach you about how you matter to the person correcting you?
 2. Bosco insists: correct *in private*. Apart from the others. Why is that so hard with our own kids in our own home? What gets in the way?
 3. There's a difference between "you did a wrong thing" and "what is WRONG with you?" One is correctable. The other becomes identity. How often do we cross that line under stress?
 4. When was the last time YOU were corrected well by another man? What made it land instead of wound?
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The deeper theological move

When you correct your kid badly, you don't just bruise him; you bruise his image of God the Father. The voice that says "what is wrong with you?" becomes the voice he hears when he tries to pray after a sin. The hand that strikes becomes the hand he braces for in Confession. You are forming his picture of the One who will correct him forever.

The Father in scripture corrects His own. Read Hebrews 12 sometime this week. But every correction the Father gives is *in camera caritatis*. He never humiliates. He never attacks character. He calls Peter back three times after three denials. The men around this table who experienced humiliating correction will tend to picture God's correction the same way. Naming Bosco's distinction today is also naming the way the Father actually corrects.

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

Last week each of us committed to one specific block of full presence with one specific person. Phone away, doing what they love. Around the table: did you do it? What happened?

Live application

Name one correction moment from the last 7 days. One sentence. Was it formative or wounding? Just name it.

Monday-morning commitment

This week, ONE specific correction handled with reason and dignity. Private, not public. Specific behavior, not character attack. End by naming that you love them.

My one specific person to correct this way:

The behavior I'll correct (not the character):

The line I'll say at the end that names my love for them:

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>.