

Session 7: Loving-kindness, deeper

The deepest session in the curriculum. Loved before led, by the kids and by the Father.

Welcome back

Last week we sat with Confession as the engine. Today is the deepest session in the curriculum, the one I came back from a silent retreat carrying. **To be followed, one must first be loved.** This is the heart Bosco lived out and the heart he asked his Salesians to recover in the 1884 letter.

Same contract. One specific moment, every week. We're nearly there.

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

Your 14-year-old is in his room with the door closed. You haven't had a real conversation in three weeks. The exchanges are functional. Homework, dinner, ride to practice. He answers with one word. You used to be the one he ran to.

You've been doing all the right things. You bring him to Mass. You correct him when needed. You set the rules. You provide. You enforce.

But somewhere in the last year you stopped showing up to his stuff. You stopped asking about the video game he plays. You stopped sitting on his bed at night for the five minutes that used to mean everything to him. You replaced the love deposit with the authority withdrawal.

Now you knock on his door and he says "what?" without opening it. And you stand there in the hallway and you understand: you have been trying to lead him with authority you forgot to keep depositing love into.

That is the moment. That is what Bosco wrote a whole letter to Rome about.

Today's reading

From Don Bosco's Letter from Rome, 10 May 1884. The deepest passage. Valfré has just told Bosco that his boys must not only BE loved, they must KNOW they are loved. Bosco asks how. Valfré answers.

“How are we to break down these barriers?”

“By a friendly familiarity with the boys, especially in recreation. You cannot have love without this familiarity, and where this is not evident, there cannot be confidence. He who wants to be loved must show that he loves. Our Lord Jesus Christ made himself small with the small and bore our weaknesses. There he is, the master of familiarity. The teacher seen only in the cathedra is a teacher and nothing more, but if he goes to recreation with the boys, he becomes their brother.”

“If anyone knows he is loved, he loves in return; and if he loves, he can obtain anything, especially from the young.”

And later in the same letter, Bosco himself writes:

Confidence sets up an electric current between the boys and their Superiors. Hearts are opened, the boys make known their needs, they reveal their faults. This love enables the Superiors to bear the fatigues, the annoyances, the ingratitude, the disturbances, the failings, and the negligences of the boys.

The concept in plain language

Amorevolezza isn't about loving more. It's about showing the love so that the person you love KNOWS it. Most of us love our kids more than they will ever know. That is not enough. They have to know it. The showing is the work of fatherhood. The cathedra is the comfortable place; the floor is where love is shown. The men at this table all need to climb down from the cathedra into recreation with the people we love.

Discussion questions

1. Valfré says, “*He who wants to be loved must show that he loves.*” Where are you showing the love before expecting the obedience? Where are you skipping the showing and going straight to the asking?
 2. Bosco says love “enables the Superiors to bear the fatigues, the annoyances, the ingratitude.” Where are you running on willpower instead of on love? What happens to your patience when the love is missing?
 3. Who in your life has been a Father to you in this way: present, on the same ground, loving you before requiring anything from you? What did that do for you?
 4. The deepest question, applied to God: do you believe the Father in heaven loves you the way Bosco describes loving these boys? Do you let Him love you that way? Or do you keep Him at arm's length where it's safer?
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The deeper theological move

The reason this is so hard for us is that most of us have not let ourselves be loved by the Father this way. We are doing for our kids the same thing the Father wants to do for us, and we are running on empty because we won't let Him do it for us. We climb down to be on the floor with our 4-year-old, but we keep the Father at arm's length. We make ourselves available to the man we are sponsoring, but we don't let ourselves be available to the Father in the same way.

Every man at this table is here because he wants to be a better father. The deeper truth is that he can only be a better father to the degree he lets himself be a son. Bosco wrote the Letter from Rome from his own knees. He could ask the Salesians to recover amorevolezza only because he himself had been formed by amorevolezza, by Christ who came down to him.

Tonight or this week, sit with this: where am I not letting the Father love me? What am I protecting? The kids we love are watching for the answer to that question more than for anything else we do.

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

Last week each of us committed to going to Confession and telling one specific person we went. Around the table: did you go? Did you tell someone? What changed?

Live application

Name one specific moment in the last 7 days where you tried to lead from authority alone, without the love deposit. One sentence.

Monday-morning commitment

This week, ONE specific act aimed at being LOVED, not just obeyed, by one specific person you lead. Not transactional. Not "so they'll listen." Just the act of being loved by them in a new way.

My one specific person:

My one specific act this week aimed at being loved by them:

What I'll NOT do this week with them (the authority move I'll set down):

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>.