



# Off-Script Kids

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**A Reflective and Theological  
Perspective for Parents in Pain**

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***A Conference for Churches***

# Off-Script Kids

## *Addressing a Neglected Reality*

“Truly loved it! Thank you!”

“This has been a balm to me personally.”

“So lovingly presented. So truly helpful and practical.”

“So truly sweet to no longer feel so isolated or unique.”

“Truly a blessing for us, and we have so many people we can share this with, too.”

“You were an instrument to help lift burdens off our shoulders.”

“Your presentation covered so many things I struggle with, such as doubt, guilt, regret. It’s so comforting to take some of that pressure off and rely on God to work in our children’s lives.”

“This presentation has been wonderful! So helpful and encouraging.”

“Wonderful content, gracious delivery -- Thank you!!”

“It has been such a rich blessing.”

“I know I have made some lifelong prayer partners.”

Off-Script Kids is a resource for parents whose kids have taken a life trajectory different than those envisioned by their parents. It is particularly for Christian parents who grieve that their children, whom they raised in the church, have chosen to live their lives away from the church. This is a common reality for which, sadly, many mature parents feel great shame, sometimes to the point of distancing themselves from other Christians and erecting barriers to certain conversations.

We are structuring this content in a conference format believing that for many parents, reading books or merely listening to content has limited benefit. To make progress in accepting their reality many need to connect with other parents facing the same issues and gain support in community as they orient a response.

Further, this format allows parents a time of rest and respite. This encourages not only the intake and processing of content, but the possibility of reflection and interaction.

Though the content presented arises from a particular theological framework, specifically one which is reformed and covenantal, the content is intentionally structured to be inclusive. The vows that Presbyterians take often reflect the aspirations that Baptists or others infer. Our God is the same and our longings are similar.

All of the content is bathed in a consideration of the Psalms.

Parents need to be given space to hope, but they also need to be given permission to lament. The Psalms invite us to both.

The content is aimed toward a gracious acceptance of our children, as much as that is possible, and a gracious, and where necessary repentant, acceptance of ourselves. It is not intended to fix our kids; it is intended, as much as God allows, to fix ourselves.



# Off-Script Kids

## Content Overview

### Session One > A Prayer for Sleepless Parents: Assessing Our Reality

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**Target:** To set the lay of the land, the struggles we feel, and how we will go about addressing those struggles.

**Psalm:** Psalm 77:1-15

**Summary:** In this session, we define the idea of the “off-script” kid, the one who in his or her maturity does not meet their parents’ expectations. Particularly the concern is for Christian parents who expected their children to continue in the Christian walk to which they were introduced as children, but these children have gone a different direction. We examine the emotions this produces, particularly the potential anger at the child and at God. We consider the shame that parents can feel, and the longings they still have. We will look at what can be expected in the course of our time together. The perspective we bring, and it is but one perspective, is not aimed at “saving” the child but at “saving” the parent.

### Session Two > God’s Covenant Promises: Resetting Our Hope

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**Target:** To consider what we have expected and should expect from God, in the light of the covenant promises we claim on our children’s behalf at their birth (or baptism). This is aimed at the mixture of emotions parents feel toward God.

**Psalm:** Psalm 73:1-14, 21-26

**Summary:** In this session, parents will be asked to candidly confront their anger at God where that exists. Then, to reset those emotions, we will consider from Scripture what God has NOT promised regarding our children, contrasted with what we can discern that he HAS promised. This is the most theologically challenging of the sessions, but one in which some deeply misleading concerns need to be drained of their power so that we can once again hope for our children, and renew our hope in God.



# Off-Script Kids

## Content Overview

### Session Three > Expectations, Mistakes, and Repentance: Reframing Our Culpability

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**Target:** To consider what God really expects of us, recasting, or rejecting, the lies that pepper the Christian parenting culture. This is aimed at the mixture of emotions parents feel toward themselves

**Psalm:** Psalm 31:1-18

**Summary:** So much of the shame Christian parents feel arises from the false expectations that were placed upon them. Those expectations and the sense of failure they produced need to be stripped of their power. At the same time, parents who really have acted poorly, or wrongly, need to be challenged to own the impact of their words and actions. Repentance may be necessary, and confessing wrong may be the first step in doing the hard work of rebuilding a shattered relationship.

### Session Four > The Improvisational Parent: Rethinking Our Responsibility

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**Target:** To consider the most productive steps parents can take given the reality that is before them. This is aimed at the mixture of emotions we have toward our kids and at the steps we can take and the posture we can assume given the realities that are present.

**Psalm:** Psalm 146:1-10

**Summary:** Here is where we try to get as practical as we can be given the diversity of our children's situations. Parenting which we might have once viewed programmatically is now to be understood as improv. But even in improv there are certain general principles that can guide our words and actions. Some of these guidelines will seem obvious. That which is obvious, however, is sometimes so discounted that we cannot see that we are even missing it.



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## Content Overview

### Session Five > An Invitation to Dance: Embracing Our Standing

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**Target:** To encourage parents to lay aside their guilt and shame to accept the forgiveness of God, so that they might link their joy to the gospel and not to the decisions and situations and testimony of their children.

**Psalm:** Psalm 30:1-12

**Summary:** The psalm speaks of finding joy in the morning. This is where we want this content to land - to have participants leave with a greater sense of the kindness and grace of God. The gospel needs to consume all our regrets and all our uncertainties and replace them with the presence of a powerful and loving Father who has loved us with all our failings. The God who gave his son for us has not turned his back on us, no matter how it might feel. We are imperfect parents and broken persons, but God's grace cuts through all of that and calls us his beloved.

### Typical Conference Schedule:

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#### FRIDAY

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|-----------|---|
| 6:30-6:45 | Welcome and Orientation   |
| 6:45-7:30 | Session 1: A Prayer for Sleepless Parents                       |
| 7:30-8:15 | Session 2a: God's Covenant Promises - What God has NOT Promised |
| 8:15-9:00 | Session 2b: God's Covenant Promises - What God HAS Promised     |

#### SATURDAY

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|-------------|--|
| 9:00-10:15  | Session 3: Expectations, Mistakes, and Guilt |
| 10:30-11:45 | Session 4: The Improvisational Parent        |
| 11:45-12:45 | Lunch  |
| 1:00-2:00   | Q/A / Session 5: An Invitation to Dance      |



# Recommendations



Our church had the privilege of hosting Randy Greenwald for a weekend series of seminars on "Off Script Kids." First, allow me to explain why we hosted such an event:

When I began to serve as pastor of this church, I started to notice that almost every couple who had adult children was asking me to pray for at least one of their children who had turned from the faith in which they were raised. As we would pray and counsel together over these loved ones, I began to see how much shame, confusion, and frustration accompanied those prayer requests. *Where were the promises of God? Is this my fault? What should I do now? Do I dare have any hope for my child?* These were the questions I was hearing on a regular basis. And as I searched for ways to minister to these wounded friends, I could find no resources that addressed both the theological questions as well as the emotional and practical needs of those who asked them.

The time we spent with Randy discussing these topics continues to bless us beyond the few hours we had together, and that has more than repaid the investments we made in planning it. The content not only addressed the questions in our minds and the uneasiness in our hearts, it also equipped our members to minister to others. Those who attended feel more prepared to reach out to grown children that don't want to be near the church. And they are applying the Biblical wisdom they gained by encouraging and counseling younger parents - those struggling to love, guide, and shepherd the children still in our homes and churches. This has been a much-needed antidote to the formulaic, behavioralistic parenting methods that Christian parents often have pushed at them and which are accompanied by promises that cannot be supported by Scripture. Randy helped us rethink what Scripture calls us to as parents, and he helped us confront the shame and despair faced by many whose children have not "followed the script" set by their parents and their church.

What can you expect if your church hosts this time? It will raise hard questions. It will make some people squirm in their seats as deeply held assumptions are challenged from God's Word. Sin may be confessed. There will probably be some tears. But the gospel will be preached and applied to our failures, our disappointments, our hopes, and our families. I expect that, long after the weekend has drawn to a close, these topics will continue to be discussed among you as you seek to encourage one another to be faithful as the parents God has called you to be, even when it doesn't produce the results you expected or desired.

If it would be of any help to you, I'd be happy to discuss with your church about how we hosted this event and more about what our experience has been.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Edenfield", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Rob Edenfield  
Senior Pastor

Treasure Coast Presbyterian Church  
rob@treasurecoastpca.org

# Recommendations



Some human problems are worn on the sleeve, freely and openly discussed without fear and shame. But other problems are buried deep within the human chest, never to see the light of day.

If you were able to peer into the hearts of your brothers and sisters in Christ, my guess is you would find a particular sorrow among many of them—a sorrow that has made them ask the question, “Am I the only one?” A sorrow that has caused shame to spread like mildew. A sorrow that, even in their happiest moments, is always in the back of their minds. It is the sorrow over their covenant children.

That is why the “Off-Script Kids” retreat/conference is so important. It gives hurting parents exactly what they need: a place to unlearn the lies and meditate on the biblical truths that are meant to encourage and shape us; a minister who has shepherded the hearts of both children and parents; a group of people with their own deep parental wounds and worries; and a time of prayer to the God who loves our children more than we do.

My church hosted the “Off-Script Kids” conference, and it couldn’t have gone any better. My people left encouraged, informed, hopeful, and free. My guess is that is what you want for your people, too.

**Kurt Gray**  
**Associate Pastor, Redeemer Church**  
**Hurricane, WV**

# The Presenter



**Randy Greenwald**

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Randy Greenwald is from Oviedo, Florida, and is the pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church. He is also the author of *Greatheart's Table*, a newsletter and a podcast that encourages pastors, especially those in smaller churches, to be comfortable in their pastoral skin ([greatheartstable.com](http://greatheartstable.com)).

His book ***Something Worth Living For***, a presentation of historic Christianity based upon the content of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, was published by Christian Focus Publications in 2020.

Randy grew up in Loveland, Ohio, a (then) small town outside Cincinnati. After graduating from Michigan State University he taught seventh-grade English for three years before attending and graduating from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. He pastored a church on Florida's Gulf coast for twenty-five years before being called to his current church in 2010. He is married to Barb with whom he has been blessed with six children and many grandchildren.

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For more information, email Randy at [randy@greatheartstable.com](mailto:randy@greatheartstable.com)