Running for THE PRIZE

How the Hope of the Gospel Fuels Our Ministry
Running for THE PRIZE

IN FEBRUARY, AS THE SPOTLIGHT turned to the Olympic Games in Beijing, we watched world-class athletes ski, skate, sled, and snowboard their way into history. After a lifetime of training and sacrifice, these competitors put it all on the line as they chased the highest prize: Olympic gold.

While most of us won’t ever hurtle down a mountain or heft a curling stone, as followers of Jesus, we have something in common with our Olympic heroes. We run for the prize.

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul wrote: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (1 Cor. 9:24-25). Paul reminds us that the way of Jesus builds perseverance, discipline, and focus. While the prize of our glorious inheritance is secure in Christ, we are called to run toward it with intention, strengthened by the promises of his Word.

More athletic imagery surfaces in Paul’s letter to the Philippians: “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13b-14). Propelled by the gospel, Paul kept his eyes on the finish line. He knew that what lay ahead—salvation in all its fullness—far outshone the sweat and struggle of his present circumstances.

As we consider Paul’s words, we reflect on the ways God has equipped the Thirdmill team and its global partners to run with endurance in the midst of health challenges, travel restrictions, political unrest and persecution. From milestones in our translation work to flourishing global partnerships through The Thirdmill Institute, we are seeing God open up new pathways for his Word to go forth.

We marvel at the ways God is using Thirdmill materials to spur on believers like these:

- The pastor who took a 10-hour detour around a war zone to obtain a microSD card with Thirdmill course material.
- The leader who began a Thirdmill Learning Community in his city despite the threat of government persecution.
- The seminary partnership that drew over 800 participants to its opening services on Zoom—people who had just rebuilt their homes and churches after an earthquake.

With visions of the Olympic ceremonies fresh in our minds, we rejoice in another display of nations: the 1.6 million+ reported students who have been equipped by Thirdmill and countless others who have supported and prayed for this ministry over the years.

As we take in the scenes of what God is doing in our midst, may we be strengthened as fellow athletes in the upward call of Christ. His ways, and his Word, are far more precious than gold.

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.” —1 Corinthians 9:24

THIRD MILL / SPRING 2022
Q&A WITH ERIC LINARES

Longtime Staff Member Recently Named Executive Director of Thirdmill

THE THIRDMILL BOARD OF DIRECTORS is pleased to announce that on January 1, 2022, Eric Linares was named Executive Director of Thirdmill. Eric will be working alongside Thirdmill President Dr. Richard Pratt to oversee and develop the organization. We recently sat down with Eric to learn more about his background and his new role at Thirdmill.

Q. Eric, tell us about yourself. Where are you from, and where did you go to school?

A. I was born and raised in Panama City, Panama. My father grew up in Kansas and my mom in Panama. I have a broad heritage mix of Peruvian, Ecuadorian, Panamanian, and good ole Kansas farmers.

I came to the U.S. to go to college in Kansas when I was 18 years old. I graduated with a B.A. in Communications from Wichita State University, a Master’s of Divinity from Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, and I’m working on my MBA right now.

Q. What was your initial role at Thirdmill? How has that changed over the years?

A. When I first came on board in January of 2006, I was a video editor/graphic artist for the English video department, and I also did video editing for the Spanish department. A few years later I was promoted to Creative Director, and about ten years ago I was offered the position of VP of Production. My latest role as Executive Director started in January, although we have been planning for this transition for the past 18 months.

Q. What are some of your responsibilities as Executive Director?

A. My primary responsibility, currently, is to foster interdepartmental cooperation, improve performance, and continue developing the organization’s culture and strategy as we broaden our scope and impact around the world.

Q. What are you most excited about at this point in Thirdmill’s history?

A. I’m excited about the growing impact Thirdmill is having with the launch of the Thirdmill Global Network. We’ve already served so many ministry leaders over the past 24 years, but we’ve grown beyond curriculum development and distribution to also providing training programs and fostering partnerships with learning communities worldwide.

I’m also excited about our team. We have such a wonderful group of men and women serving so diligently in all capacities. Our team works so hard because we believe in the mission so passionately. To many of us, this is not just a job, but a calling, and knowing that we’re meeting the dire need of training church leaders who will foster communities of faith all around the world with sound biblical and theological education is so rewarding. I believe our biggest impact is still to be seen with the second and third generation of leaders emerging and thriving within their local context, and I hope to be here to cheer them on.

Q. Can you tell us a little about your family?

A. Of course! I’ve been married to my sweet wife, Ruth, for almost 25 years. She is the Office Director at The Pregnancy Center of Sanford. Her work with at-risk women humbles and astounds me so much. Together we’ve raised three children: Annabella, Logan, and Nicholas. I’m grateful the Lord has blessed me with such a wonderful family.

Q. What do you like to do in your spare time?

A. I like to travel with my family and visit the Disney theme parks. Both of these have been severely hampered over the last couple of years with the COVID-19 pandemic, but we look forward to continuing our adventures once things improve. I also enjoy cooking for guests and watching mixed martial arts competitions.

Q. Anything else you’d like to share?

A. I recognize the wonderful opportunity I’ve been given to serve as Executive Director of Thirdmill. My prayer is that I may serve the Lord and our team well in this role. I am deeply committed to the vision to provide biblical education, for the world, for free, and I’m grateful that Richard and the board have trusted me to help carry this vision to the next phase of our organization.
Stories from the Field

“Anything to get the Word better understood for preachers is absolutely necessary. Now, as technology proliferates, your video and audio are just so amazing. This is the key to the future of the church globally.”

—ANDY, CANADA

“I’ve gone through your courses and find everything very rich. We can download them and start teaching the pastors here. We’re excited to partner with you, as it’s our desire to help build our ministers more.”

—SAMUEL, SIERRA LEONE

“I am a young pastor with great intentions of learning more about the Word of God, and I know very well that this organization has highly recognized teachers with deep knowledge about the doctrines… Thank you very much for this ministry that has been an instrument of grace and that has blessed many throughout the world.”

—JOSE, EL SALVADOR

TRAINING IN CHINA: Pastors participated in a recent 3-day training in China, facilitated by a Thirdmill partner.

“My wife and I were sent by the church to Mainland China in June 2011. God has used the miracle of these ten years. At present, we have established four family churches. In addition, there are Bible study groups in [locations withheld].

“I applied to you for a theology course so that we don’t have to stop studying [in the midst of government restrictions]. We will also try our best to make this resource benefit many Chinese churches in order to expand the kingdom of God.”

—ADAM, TAIWAN

Paul’s Theology Now Available

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR a weekly Bible study for your small group? Thirdmill has just released its foundational series, The Heart of Paul’s Theology, in our popular Study at Home format.

Recently updated from the original 2005 version, the study features teaching by The Very Rev. Dr. Reggie Kidd, interviews with global experts, and new graphics that make fundamental but complex aspects of theology even more accessible. We explore the themes most central to Paul’s theology, orienting us to Paul’s apostolic ministry and describing his central message and worldview.

The series is divided into 12 sessions, releasing one per week on Friday mornings at 9AM ET. Each session includes a 20-minute video and downloadable handouts with discussion topics and application questions. We’re excited for you to engage with God’s Word in this way as you explore the heart of Paul’s gospel!

ACCESS THE STUDY online at thirdmill.org/study/series.asp/vs/HPT or visit youtube.com/thirdmillvideos.
NEWS & EVENTS

Equipping Leaders through The Thirdmill Institute

LAUNCHED IN 2021, THE THIRD MILL INSTITUTE is a structured certificate program that provides free biblical and theological training for anyone interested in ministry. The program is designed to be done in small groups, where life and ministry skills are emphasized through the guidance of local trainers.

The Institute’s program is provided free of charge and is open to everyone, regardless of previous education, and has the flexibility of being implemented over the internet or offline. It uses Thirdmill’s high-quality curriculum to train students in the Bible and theology while placing increased emphasis on personal and ministry application.

The Thirdmill Institute works with churches and Christian leaders to create local learning communities consisting of a group of students and a local trainer. We call these local leaders Institute Trainers. Our curriculum is designed to lift the burden of preparing and teaching classes so these trainers can focus on local application.

Students may earn a Diploma in Christian Ministry by completing three distinct certificates. Each certificate

THIRD MILL INSTITUTE TRAINER TRAINING, Ethiopia. For more information or to register as a trainer, visit thirdmillinstitute.org.

combines a subset of Thirdmill courses with ministry and life skills acquisition and application. The Institute’s Foundations Certificate is now available in English and Spanish. Additional certificates and languages will be added in the near future as funding becomes available.

Hindi Curriculum Project Reaches Completion

TRANSLATION MILESTONE: The Hindi project reflects the first finished curriculum for a non in-house language, completed with the help of our international partners.

IN A MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENT, Thirdmill partners have completed translating the full Thirdmill curriculum of video, audio, and manuscripts for all 27 courses into Hindi. The Hindi language is the third most spoken language in the world, with over 600 million speakers.

“Our partners did a fantastic job,” said David Zoeller, Thirdmill’s Director of Digital Management, reflecting on this multi-year project. (For security reasons, the translators’ names are withheld.) “We’re very fortunate to work with such incredible partners who have made this possible. From a strategic standpoint, this is a huge step forward in reaching every corner of the globe with our curriculum and building learning communities.”

At the present time, Thirdmill offers courses in 22 major languages, covering 46% of the world’s population, with plans to add 10 more languages over the next five years. Our desire is to provide leaders with the curriculum they need in their own languages for maximum impact.
Learn more about Thirdmill’s latest study for small groups inside this newsletter!

Join us in equipping pastors and church leaders around the globe with sound biblical education!

To give to Thirdmill, scan the QR code below or visit: tmm.convio.net/Newsletter

316 Live Oaks Blvd.
Casselberry, FL 32707-3867

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

STUDY at home
THE Heart OF PAUL’S THEOLOGY

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