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# *The Ripple Effect in Colombia*

Transforming Cities Through Gospel-Centered Leadership

**PLUS:** Teaching Theology  
in Uganda's Heartlands

# The Ripple Effect in Colombia



*Training in Colombia*



*Pastor Jota Escobar and his family*



*City to City meeting*

## Transforming Cities Through Gospel-Centered Leadership

In the summer of 2023, Thirdmill featured a story about a pastor named José (Jota) Escobar and his work in Colombia.

For decades, people in Colombia have suffered under the abuse and influence of prosperity gospel teaching and theological distortions in unhealthy churches. Denominations often operate in isolation, causing division rather than fostering Christian unity. And with just two seminars in the entire country, many who are called to leadership lack the resources or opportunity to study theology, leaving them unequipped to counteract these fallacies.

But Pastor Jota had a vision to see “gospel-centered churches, healthy pastors, and leaders raising up healthy communities, and in turn, equipping others to impact their contexts for social, cultural, and spiritual renewal.” This led him to Thirdmill.

Pastor Jota serves as the lead pastor of *Iglesia Gracia Abundante* in Cartagena and as the Director of City to City Colombia. While planting *Gracia Abundante*, he recognized his need for deeper theological education to pastor effectively. He found Thirdmill’s free, online pastoral training program for Latin American leaders through Birmingham Theological Seminary.

“[Studying Thirdmill] changed my theological understanding and ... my approach to my ministry,” Pastor Jota says. “It’s the best ... theological and biblical program to train pastors and leaders to transform other lives.”

Convinced that pastors across Colombia needed to experience this remarkable teaching, Pastor Jota asked us to help him train seven Colombian pastors to facilitate learning communities. That was a year and a half ago, and his request has sparked a ripple effect of spiritual formation across all of Colombia.

Today, an estimated 45 students are engaged in Thirdmill learning communities from Cartagena to Barranquilla, Medellín, Cali, and online. These students are in their 20s to 50s and come from diverse church backgrounds—Pentecostal, Baptist, Reformed, Presbyterian, and non-denominational. Their different traditions shape how they study together, approaching God’s Word with “eyes wide open to all the perspectives that the Word of God gives us,” as Pastor Jota puts it.

Not only are these students understanding theology more deeply, but they are also applying it in their own contexts. José Márquez, a busy lay elder at Pastor Jota’s church who

runs a successful logistics business, is studying the Thirdmill Institute's Foundations Certificate. Pastor Jota says that José's new perspective about God's plan and how the gospel works in our lives has "changed everything in his own company [and] in his church services as a lay elder."

Hundreds of miles away in Barranquilla, Enzo, a young, bivocational pastor studying with Thirdmill Institute, caught the attention of his senior pastor, Pastor Otto Salcedo of *Iglesia Cristiana Canaán*.

Pastor Otto saw how Enzo's preaching had been transformed with fresh perspectives on the gospel in every sermon and growth in his biblical worldview. Pastor Otto contacted Pastor Jota, who agreed to hold training workshops for pastors in the region. Since the training, Pastor Otto's church (established over 45 years ago) is now collaborating with other churches and denominations to plant a new church.

And the effect of Thirdmill's training doesn't stop there!

Pastor Jota also serves as the Director of City to City Colombia. Part of City to City's mission is "helping local leaders develop gospel movements in their cities through urban ecosystems."<sup>1</sup> This entails forming Gospel City Networks. These local gatherings, often led by Thirdmill students, are places to foster fellowship, share testimonies of God's work, and provide in-person biblical training. After a time of sharing and learning, these Christians then go out together into their cities for street evangelism and service opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> [www.citytocitylatam.com/about](http://www.citytocitylatam.com/about)

Through these networks, Thirdmill students are becoming mobilizers and catalysts for other believers, encouraging them in their learning to then be sent out into the world. These students' transformations are touching far more lives than we can count.

Stirred by the fruit of this movement, Pastor Jota dreams of establishing a seminary on Colombia's Caribbean coast using Thirdmill's curriculum. This seminary would serve as a model for expanding theological training, with the goal of planting similar institutions across the country. He believes the quality of Thirdmill's courses rivals that of well-established seminaries in Brazil and the U.S., and best of all, it's free. Imagine the greater harvest to come

through the multiplication of even more well-trained Colombian pastors.

"There's a lot of people needing theological education to transform their context. There's a lot of people with a real heart to serve their cities, their context, their small towns, but they need the theological education to give to others the real gospel," Pastor Jota says. "Thirdmill is a real blessing for many of us... and I know we can bless others, but we need to work together more ... to impact more lives in our cities and in our countries."

To God be the glory as Colombian believers continue to be the hands and feet of Jesus, bringing the hope of the gospel to their cities and beyond!

*[Studying Thirdmill] changed my theological understanding and ... my approach to my ministry. It's the best ... theological and biblical program to train pastors and leaders to transform other lives.*

**Pastor Jota Escobar**

Iglesia Gracia Abundante in Cartagena  
Director of City to City Colombia



Students from Cartagena and Medellin

# Bringing Theology to Uganda's Heartlands

## Thirdmill and Edgewood Ministries Join Forces

What began as a friendship between Richard Pratt, President of Thirdmill, Andrew Lamb, VP of Global Opportunities, and Hal Farnsworth, Founder and President of Edgewood Ministries, has blossomed into a powerful partnership transforming biblical education in Uganda.

Edgewood Ministries focuses on church planting, ministry training, campus outreach, and economic development, as they “join God’s work in building up the African church and equipping it to bless the nations and its people.”<sup>1</sup>

In Uganda, many pastors and church leaders, especially in rural areas,

learning communities in Kitgum, Lira, Kampala, and Gulu. The impact has been transformative.

One pastor shared, “Before, I didn’t know that the Word of God [was all powerful]. I used to live in fear, and I used to live in doubts.” But then he joined the Thirdmill Institute. “Through the Word of God,” he said, “I am able to defend myself ... not to defend myself with my strength or my personal wisdom but with the wisdom that I am learning in the Word of God.”

Jennifer Amucu of New City Bible Church in Lira expressed the sentiments of many Ugandan pastors when she told us, “We are so grateful for what Thirdmill is doing for us in this patch of Uganda.

Jeremiah Ocen



Edgewood/Thirdmill Students



Training in Kitgum



Thirdmill Institute Group at Kitgum



Uganda Learning Center



Learning Communities Studying



have little access to formal theological education. The few Bible colleges that exist are often too far away or too costly for those in need of deeper biblical training. Most pastors rely on informal seminars or conferences that offer only surface-level teaching.

Although Edgewood’s efforts to equip church leaders were effective, they fell far short of meeting the momentous growth that was occurring in the Ugandan church. So, in 2023, they invited Cloud Roman, Thirdmill’s Area Director for East and Horn of Africa, to introduce the Thirdmill Institute at Edgewood’s annual pastor training conference in Kampala. Impressed by the material, Edgewood made Thirdmill’s biblical curriculum the cornerstone of their training efforts.

Today, through the leadership of Jeremiah Ocen, Edgewood’s Training Coordinator and Thirdmill’s country representative in Uganda, Edgewood has established Thirdmill

learning communities in Kitgum, Lira, Kampala, and Gulu. The impact has been transformative.

Our partnership with Edgewood Ministries is making a powerful difference, and with Sub-Saharan Africa home to the fastest-growing Christian population in the world, this is only the beginning. Thirdmill’s mission is to empower Christian leaders with the education they need to grow the church and transform communities, regardless of language, location, or income. And working with Edgewood Ministries, we get to see this transformation happening today in Uganda.

Stay tuned for updates on the impact of this incredible partnership!

EDGEWOOD  
MINISTRIES



<sup>1</sup> [www.edgewoodministries.com](http://www.edgewoodministries.com)

# Thirdmill – By the Numbers

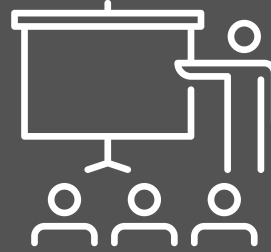
2.04 million



reported students trained through Thirdmill materials

27

languages with available  
Thirdmill materials



1,735

established Thirdmill  
Institute learning  
communities



732

partners using Thirdmill  
materials in their organizations

178

nations currently  
served by the

Thirdmill  
Global  
Network



17,133

certificate students  
enrolled in

Thirdmill  
Institute



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

We are so grateful for the people God raises up to advance the mission of providing **Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.**



Meet Ivan Mandzhiev, our new Russian volunteer, who has answered God's call to be a missionary and bring Thirdmill to unreached regions of Russia. Originally from Elista in the Southern Federal District, Ivan recently made a courageous move, guided by the Lord, to Vladivostok in the Far Eastern District, near China, North Korea, and the Sea of Japan.



The Golden Bridge in Vladivostok, Russia

In Vladivostok, Ivan is actively working with the youth in his church, helping them grow in their faith through Thirdmill's curriculum. He has already established a Learning Community and is preparing to visit other churches in the Far Eastern District to introduce Thirdmill's resources. Please pray for Ivan and the Russian body of Christ as they seek to deepen their understanding of God's Word!

# Why Host a Multi-Donor Event?



Our Multi-Donor Events (MDEs) offer a special opportunity to engage with Thirdmill's mission and vision while supporting our work through charitable giving. These intimate gatherings of family, friends, and neighbors not only foster meaningful connections but also help expand our network of supporters while raising crucial funds to sustain and grow our mission of providing biblical education to believers around the world.

Over the years, we've had the privilege of collaborating with hosts in New York City, Memphis, Dallas, Charleston, and more, meeting new friends and engaging with passionate partners who share our commitment to equipping under-resourced pastors.

Hosting an MDE is simple and rewarding. Thirdmill's dedicated staff is here to support you—whether assisting with

logistics, providing refreshments, managing setup and cleanup, or just ensuring everything runs smoothly. We also invite key Thirdmill leaders to attend your gathering, offering a personal connection with your guests and helping to deepen their understanding of the global impact of their support.

For many, learning about how God's kingdom is growing worldwide and how they can play a vital role in this transformative work, leads to a deeper sense of purpose and generosity.



If you'd like to host a Multi-Donor Event, please reach out to Amy Bishop at [abishop@thirdmill.org](mailto:abishop@thirdmill.org). We would be thrilled to collaborate with you to further our shared vision and raise support for the ongoing work of Thirdmill.

## Maximize Your Generosity with a Donor-Advised Fund!

**A donor-advised fund (DAF) is a powerful tool** to simplify your charitable giving and maximize your impact. By contributing to a DAF, you can enjoy immediate tax benefits while giving yourself the flexibility to support the causes you care about over time.

It's an easy, effective way to manage your giving, and it allows you to respond to needs as they arise.

Consider establishing a DAF today to make giving simpler, more strategic, and deeply rewarding. Your generosity can have a lasting impact for years to come!

For more information or a recommendation of DAF sponsors, contact Jeremy Ruch at [jruch@thirdmill.org](mailto:jruch@thirdmill.org).

### Here's how it works:

- Make a tax-deductible donation to your DAF.
- Let the funds grow tax-free.
- Recommend grants to your favorite charities whenever you're ready.



To give to Thirdmill, scan the QR code or visit: [thirdmill.org/gift](https://thirdmill.org/gift)

**Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.**

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