1. What is a Thirdmill class?
ABOUT THIRD MILL

Founded in 1997, Thirdmill is a non-profit Evangelical Christian ministry dedicated to providing:

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

Our goal is to offer free Christian education to hundreds of thousands of pastors and Christian leaders around the world who lack sufficient training for ministry. We are meeting this goal by producing and globally distributing an unparalleled multimedia seminary curriculum in English, Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, and Spanish. Our curriculum is also being translated into more than a dozen other languages through our partner ministries. The curriculum consists of graphic-driven videos, printed instruction, and internet resources. It is designed to be used by schools, groups, and individuals, both online and in learning communities.

Over the years, we have developed a highly cost-effective method of producing award-winning multimedia lessons of the finest content and quality. Our writers and editors are theologically-trained educators, our translators are theologically-astute native speakers of their target languages, and our lessons contain the insights of hundreds of respected seminary professors and pastors from around the world. In addition, our graphic designers, illustrators, and producers adhere to the highest production standards using state-of-the-art equipment and techniques.

In order to accomplish our distribution goals, Thirdmill has forged strategic partnerships with churches, seminaries, Bible schools, missionaries, Christian broadcasters and satellite television providers, and other organizations. These relationships have already resulted in the distribution of countless video lessons to indigenous leaders, pastors, and seminary students. Our websites also serve as avenues of distribution and provide additional materials to supplement our lessons, including materials on how to start your own learning community.

Thirdmill is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) corporation. We depend on the generous, tax-deductible contributions of churches, foundations, businesses, and individuals. For more information about our ministry, and to learn how you can get involved, please visit [www.thirdmill.org](http://www.thirdmill.org).

For videos, lesson guides and other resources, visit Thirdmill at thirdmill.org.
What Is a Thirdmill class?

Let’s begin with a basic question: What is a Thirdmill class? What comes to your mind when you hear someone say, “I’m going to class?” Lots of us imagine a room with desks set in rows and a teacher standing in front giving lectures. Thirdmill classes can be like this, but we mean a lot more when we talk about Thirdmill classes.

In simple terms, a Thirdmill class — or what we often call a “learning community” — is a group of people who study Thirdmill’s curriculum under the supervision of a leader or a team of leaders. When members of a Thirdmill learning community devote themselves to understanding the material, and apply it to their lives and ministries, the benefits can be astonishing.

Rev. Will Savell, The Grace Institute

The impact that we’re seeing out in the rural areas of the country, obviously is there’s a deeper understanding of the Bible. But when you start understanding the Bible more, and you’re facing off with the teachings of Christ more, all of a sudden you start changing. And so, we’re seeing these students, they’re listening to the stuff, they’re facing off with the truths of Scripture. So, holistically and spiritually it’s taking root. And education... this theology, this doctrine, this biblical academia is changing communities for the gospel’s sake.

We usually think of three kinds of Thirdmill classes:

- Physical classes where students and teachers meet face-to-face in the same place;
- Virtual classes where students and teachers study as a group without coming together in one place; and
- Hybrid classes that combine physical and virtual meetings.

Thirdmill physical classes come in many sizes. In smaller groups, students and teachers form strong bonds of friendship, even across denominational lines.

Dr. Jeff David, United World Mission

In our groups we have many who are pastors, and we encourage the pastors to build relationship with each other that they share for edification within their ministry context and build friendships that we hope will last their whole lifetime as they’re involved in ministry.

Larger classes have their own benefits. These groups reach more people at once and often have a much larger impact on the broader Christian community. In a few places, very large groups of several hundred people meet a few times a year. These students also meet
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between these large gatherings in smaller groups so that teachers can give them more personal attention.

**Rev. Marcos Buzzelli, Argentine Bible Society**

A group of about three hundred students up in the north of Argentina, they meet once a month with a huge screen. They all watch the video together, they split in small groups in the church building, and they discuss the video together. Then they go out and they meet in small groups whatever time they can meet... They do that three weeks, and after the three weeks, they meet back together for a huge gathering and a sharing of all the small groups.

Physical Thirdmill classes generally meet from one to three hours a week. Of course, many of our students have jobs, families and ministry responsibilities. So, some classes meet early in the morning. Students share a cup of coffee and get right to work. Others get together in the evenings after work. Some church leaders have dinner together and study while they eat. In other places, busy students can only meet on the weekends.

**Pastor, Central Asia**

The leaders struggle to provide for their families, most of them are working ministers. They’re pastoring a church, they’re serving in a church, but they have full-time jobs. Some of them have two full-time jobs... So, we have helped to set up a Saturday school, because that’s basically the only time they have.

There are lots of options. So, think about your situation and the kind of physical Thirdmill class that will work best for you.

It’s great when students meet together physically, but virtual classes are also an excellent alternative to just studying on your own. In many parts of the world, the distance between teachers and students makes it difficult, if not impossible, to meet together in one place. But there are many advantages to learning with people who live far away from each other when you form virtual classes.

**Igor Ionov, Tyumen Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church, Russia**

Our country is so big. Some people want to visit us but it’s four days by train. This online project, it’s the answer for this problem. People could be in one class but be far, far away from this place, from together... I’m happy that now we could do this ministry together.

When the technology is available, many of these virtual groups meet by video conference. They go online and talk with each other, perhaps one evening each week. At first it might be a little awkward, but soon relationships form, and the experience is very encouraging. Where video connections aren’t possible, students and teachers meet by phone, by email or even through social media. One great advantage of virtual classes is

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that scheduling can be much more flexible. And students can meet with the same teacher at different times.

Of course, it’s always possible to have what we call “hybrid classes.” Sometimes in hybrid classes, a number of students meet physically while others join from a distance. There are also hybrid classes that alternate between meeting together in person once a month or so and meeting virtually the rest of the time.

There are many different kinds of Thirdmill classes. Don’t get locked into just one idea of what makes a Thirdmill class. All it takes is a leader and a handful of students who commit to learning the Scriptures and sound theology using Thirdmill materials.