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ABOUT THIRDMill

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.
What if my students have difficulty with Thirdmill resources outside of class?

In many situations, even if students have their own Thirdmill resources, they may struggle to understand the material on their own. So what strategy should a teacher follow when students have difficulty understanding Thirdmill resources outside of class?

Thirdmill teachers face a serious challenge when their students aren’t able to learn much apart from what happens in class. Teachers may need to spend a lot of time in class explaining the basic concepts of our lessons to their students. This can be necessary for a variety of reasons. For instance, some students have had little formal education, which can make learning at home very difficult.

**Rev. Pier Benites, Facultad Teologica Evangelica, Guatemala**

In Guatemala education is not mandatory, so only those who want to go and have a vision to go to school will go to school. So most of this older generation has barely gone to school, and we get pastors that have only finished their second or third grade education.

Other students depend on sessions with their teachers because they grew up in cultures that never encouraged them to learn independently. For them, education *only* takes place with a teacher in a class.

**Dr. Biao Chen, Thirdmill (translation)**

In the specific culture where I teach, the education model that everyone expects is like this: The teacher lectures in the classroom, and the student’s only responsibility is to listen, write answers and take notes. So, for a teacher who wants to turn his or her students into ones who are more actively engaged in learning, the challenge can be huge, because the students expect that when a teacher is teaching, they are there simply to learn the most basic contents of the lesson. And the students are not ready to participate in learning that requires greater initiative and active engagement from them.

And sometimes, students need a lot of explanations from their teachers because they’re just beginning to study the Scriptures and theology.

**Mr. Howie Close, Woodmen Valley Chapel**

When I was in Territorial Prison, I would kind of assimilate the information, I would package it in a way where it would be digestible to our guys in there, and I started teaching it in the chapel … and we

For videos, lesson guides and other resources, visit Thirdmill at thirdmill.org.
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started to grow together and to walk together and to live this stuff out together, because I think that’s really what the material challenged us to do.

In these circumstances, how can you go beyond addressing your students’ knowledge to focusing on more practical matters of ministry and life? Of course, every group will look a little different, and you’ll need to find what works best with your students, but consider using this simple strategy:

First, make each class session about 90 minutes long. Then, divide your session into seven steps:

- an opening time of prayer
- a review and introduction
- an assessment of student comprehension
- a time for new content
- application of the material to ministry and life
- assignments for the next session
- a closing prayer

Because your students have access to Thirdmill lessons outside of class, have them watch, read or listen to the entire lesson before they come to class. This way, they can have an orientation to the lesson as a whole. Tell them to pay special attention to the part of the lesson that you’ve selected to cover in your session — usually about 25 minutes of material. Encourage them to go over this portion of the lesson several times, if necessary.

You should also have your students fill in the Lesson Guide. In some cases, they’ll be able to do these assignments individually, but many of them will find it encouraging to do this work with others in a small group. If your students live close to one another, or can meet as a group online, encourage them to work together as they prepare.

We’ll assume that you’ll be able to build on your students’ at-home preparation. So you should be able to reinforce their knowledge and still focus on application to their ministries and lives within a 90 minute class session.

Always be sure to open your session with prayer. Then take about 10 minutes for review and introduction. In your first session, introduce your students to the big ideas of the Lesson Series. In later sessions, quickly remind your students of these big ideas, and review the key points that they’ve learned in earlier sessions. Then introduce three or four key points that they should have picked up from the part of the lesson that you had them focus on at home.

At this point, it’s very helpful to take about 20 minutes to check your students’ comprehension of the work they did at home. Take them through the three or four key points that you’ve just introduced, and explore how well they understand these ideas.

In a larger group, you may want to divide the class into small groups and give them each five minutes to summarize what they learned about one of the key points. Then you can have several groups offer a two-minute summation to the entire class. In a smaller group,
you may want to assess comprehension by asking different students to address the key points you’ve introduced.

Checking student comprehension in these ways will help you see how much the group understood outside of class. It will also help you discover problems that you’ll need to address as you move toward the new content of this session.

Now you’re ready to spend around 20 minutes on the new content of the Thirdmill lesson that you’re covering in this session. Because your students have already studied this material outside of class, there’s probably no need to spend much time watching, reading or listening to more than small portions of the lesson during the class session.

Even so, your students still depend on you to explain much that is in the lesson. So, as you prepare to teach this new content, make your own extensive notes in the outline of the Lesson Guide. Select a key sentence or two in different portions of the outline to discuss with your students. It’s always good to study and be able to discuss biblical passages referred to in the lesson. And, if you can capture images from the video lesson, be ready to use them in class.

**Alexander MacLeod, E. Stanley Jones College**

Some of the students whose English is weaker struggle a little to understand the audio, but we pre-teach and then post-teach, which they find helpful. The quality of the presentation — images, pictures etc. — is also very good and particularly helpful.

Along the way, ask yourself two main questions. First, “What are my students likely to have understood as they studied the lesson outside of class?” Plan to touch on these matters lightly in class. Second, “What are they likely not to have understood as they prepared?” Be ready to explain these matters in ways that your students will be able to understand.

**Dr. Biao Chen, Thirdmill (translation)**

I usually use the Lesson Guide’s outline to prepare the main points of each lesson. That way, once I’m teaching, I have targeted clarifications or answers on hand for any student’s questions. But I spend even more time determining which points I think the students might not easily understand in the classroom, preparing to explain these to them in different ways during the follow-up teaching. In addition, I ask the students to answer the questions for this part of the lesson before they come to class. That way, I can look at their answers while preparing for the lesson, taking the time to prepare for the portions where they didn’t answer well, so that I can bring the ideas up in class again, so they can better understand these points. I can show them where they’re wrong, and deepen their comprehension of the lesson.
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Once you’ve worked your way through the new content, immediately spend about 30 minutes on application to ministry and life. Limit yourself to two or three practical issues and prepare a thorough explanation or discussion of each one.

**Rev. Andrew S. Lamb, Thirdmill**

As a leader we want to make sure that we are applying the theology and Bible that our students have to their life and ministry. And so, every week I come to the class and I’m praying. I’m thinking about my students. I’m asking the question, “God, what do you want to see happen in their lives and in their ministries?” It’s exciting to me to see a student struggle through a theological point, through the content of Scripture and say, “I have a better understanding of how to interact with the people in my ministry, how to bring the truth of Scripture to bear to what they’re going through.”

The Application Guides will be a big help for this part of your session because they often raise practical issues that are important for your students. They offer many different Case Studies, Reflection Questions and Action Assignments so, you can choose those that work best for your group. You can also contextualize the elements you’ve chosen to suit your situation. In addition, you should try to offer practical advice from your own experiences and the experiences of others. And always back up your points with specific biblical passages.

In a larger class, you may pause and have your students divide into small groups to discuss a particular practical issue and pray for the Holy Spirit’s help. In a smaller class, you can interact with the whole group, and pray for one another.

Before you dismiss the class, make assignments for the next session. Your assignments may simply entail reading, watching or listening to the portion of the Thirdmill lesson you plan to cover in the next class. You might also consider a simple Action Assignment from the Application Guide. Then, close in prayer. Now, if you have time for another session with your class before they return home, take a break and repeat the entire process.

For a variety of reasons, Thirdmill students often have difficulty learning the content of our lessons on their own. If you follow a process similar to what we’ve suggested here, you’ll be able to give them the help they need without neglecting application to their ministries and personal lives.