

Thirdmill Institute

Trainer Orientation

Thirdmill Institute exists to empower churches and local leaders globally to equip others for ministry through free certified biblical training.

What is the Thirdmill Institute?

For more than twenty years Richard Pratt and **Third Millennium Ministries** have been creating “Biblical Education, For the World, For Free” in the form of high quality, multimedia lessons covering the topics practically all seminaries uniformly offer in their Bible and Theology departments. These multimedia lessons have been translated into a host of languages and given freely to all who are willing to learn and desire to know God’s Word better. By design, these lesson series have been produced individually and without dependence upon the other series. This has given the curriculum the flexibility needed to meet a variety of needs in multiple cultures and contexts.

The **Thirdmill Institute** introduces something new. It provides design and structure by combining these lesson series into courses to give students and trainers a more standardized experience in their Learning Community environments. The **Thirdmill Institute** also meets that need for structure by laying out the overall direction of the curriculum into three certificate programs. Each Certificate incorporates weekly or regular activities, all ending in a diploma for those who complete all three. And you, the trainer, are the key to making it all work.

The goal of the Institute in the life of a student is threefold. First, that they would understand and assimilate the material. Second, that they would learn how to apply the material to their current and real-world ministry experience. And third, that the material would enrich their relationship with God and facilitate deeper growth with him.

What is your role as a trainer?

As a trainer, your role as a mentor is vital to the success of your students. You walk others through the material. In many ways, your role is one of a facilitator. The video lessons themselves will do much of the teaching, the quizzes and exam will do much of the assessment, and the discussion guides will give students the prompts needed to articulate what they have learned. Your role is to keep everyone on track and to make sure the materials for each course are used to their full potential in your particular context, especially in regard to the Ministry and Life Skills badges. To learn more about the role of trainer and the Institute’s philosophy on training please see the document “How to be an Institute Trainer.”

Who should you gather?

The people that you gather for your group or cohort is really up to you. Make sure they are dedicated and eager to learn. Make sure they have the time and energy to enter into a program like this. Make sure they are joining with you for the right reasons. After that, you are free to include whomever you would like.

Version 2.0

That being said, much of what we have included in the Institute curriculum has had in mind under-resourced pastors and church leaders as well as pastors/leaders-in-training. The Badges (more about them below) have been designed in response to the typical requirements pastors/leaders face, both in their ministries *and* in their personal lives. That isn't to say those components won't be helpful for others, to be sure. But their benefit will most clearly be seen by those who are currently in a church position or have a role in active ministry.

Keep in mind, we anticipate students will spend approximately three to five hours per week in study on their own and about one and a half hours a week with you in their group. Some courses will last eight weeks; some will last ten. And each **certificate** involves **four or five courses**. Letting students know upfront how much time and work is involved before you bring them into your group is really important.

Lastly, group size is important to consider when you are forming groups to study together. As a trainer, you'll be keeping track of the progress of these students and leading them in discussion each week. For many people, having a group larger than 5-6 would be difficult. Some could perhaps have groups as large as 12-15, but we would encourage them to break those groups into smaller units for the discussion time with designated discussion leaders. At the same time, if you only have one student in your group, don't let that stop you.

How often should you gather?

We recommend that you meet weekly to discuss each week's material. This will best facilitate understanding and application of the material. We also understand that this is not always possible in every given context, and you have the freedom to decide how often you meet.

3 Certificates = 1 Diploma

Thirdmill Institute currently offers three distinct certificate programs that, when completed as a whole, make up the Institute's **Diploma in Christian Ministry**. The first of these is called the **Foundations Certificate**. This four-course certificate lays a solid foundation in both Bible and Theology and is where all groups should start. Once complete, groups can either work on the *Certificate in Biblical Studies*, the *Certificate in Theological Studies*, or both at the same time. This has been designed that if each course is followed in 7 to 11-week modules and allowing for breaks, it will take approximately one year to complete each certificate. This can be done quicker or take longer, depending on what you and your learning community decides.

The **Certificate in Biblical Studies** covers Thirdmill's remaining Old Testament and New Testament courses, while the **Certificate in Theological Studies** covers Thirdmill's remaining Theology courses. Whether you go through all of the remaining Bible courses, all of the remaining theology courses, or bounce back and forth between the two until you are finished with both is up to you as the trainer. Unlike the four-course **Foundations Certificate**, both the Bible and the Theology certificate include *five* courses.

Thirdmill Institute Course Design

Thirdmill Institute courses are a combination of Thirdmill's lesson series plus additional documents such as Study Guides, Discussion Guides, and Badges. The courses also include a

weekly quiz and final exam. In an effort to standardize Thirdmill curriculum into 7-11 week courses, we have combined 1-3 lesson series in each course. For example, the Theological Foundations Course is a combination of *The Apostles' Creed* and *Building Your Theology*. By doing this, you will notice that the video lesson and manuscript content for *Theological Foundations* Module 7 is the same as Lesson 1 of *Building Your Theology*. To prevent any potential confusion, it is important to point out this detail to your students.

The Online Classroom (institute.thirdmill.org)

The central hub of **Thirdmill Institute** is the online classroom. This is where students go to create an account, enroll in courses, watch the lessons, take quizzes, and download relevant documents. And this is where you'll be able to track their progress. It's also where you'll be able to find everything you need to facilitate a group of students who don't have access to the internet and need an "offline" version. The full material is also available through microSD cards and in printed format where internet isn't available.

Elements of Each Course

- **Course Guide**
- **Institute Badge**
- **8-10 Modules**
- **Final Exam**

Course Guide

Every course with **Thirdmill Institute** will include a Course Guide. This document can be found at the top of the course page and will include basic information in relation to the content and purpose of the course. In particular, it will include a course description, the goals and objectives for the course, a thematic outline of course topics, an explanation of assignments, and a list of professors/pastors who contributed to the content of the lessons.

Institute Badges

One of the distinctive features of **Thirdmill Institute** is the work your group will do on ministry badges with each course. Instructions are given with each course for the badge that has been assigned and what needs to be accomplished before that badge can be awarded. Each instruction document contains four components: an opening verse/paragraph describing the badge topic, Badge Components, Discussion Topics, and a Call to Action. Our hope is you will take some time each week at the beginning of the course to talk through the larger considerations presented in the discussion topics before moving on to the calls to action towards the latter portion of the course.

Badge work, both discussion and calls to action, should take up part of your weekly discussion in your groups *for the full seven to eleven weeks* covered in the course. You, as the trainer, will draw upon your understanding of the badge topic to both facilitate the badge work and give the final stamp of approval upon completion of the Badge Criteria. Badges include topics like *teaching, leadership, church life, prayer, evangelism, devotional life*, and more.

Elements of each Module

1. Video lessons/ Manuscripts/Audio
2. Study Guides
3. Quizzes
4. Discussion Guides

1. Video lessons/ Manuscripts/Audio

At the heart of any curriculum is the content that is presented and the manner in which that content is delivered. **Thirdmill Institute** is blessed to have access to the best in multimedia biblical curriculum through **Third Millennium Ministries**. Each week students will watch, read, or listen to a lesson that includes award-winning graphics, interviews from pastors and professors around the world, and solid biblical teaching. Links to those videos and manuscripts have been included on each course homepage.

2. Study Guides

While **Thirdmill** lessons are written in a clear and understandable style, they still involve topics that are sometimes difficult to understand. At the same time, a single lesson might include quite a bit of information, many times more than would be covered by a professor in a classroom over a number of classes. In order to help students work through the materials intentionally and thoroughly, we've provided study guides for each module. Each study guide is divided into sections with time codes that correspond to the main categories covered in each module. Sections contain two main components: an **Outline for Taking Notes** and **Review Questions**. Students are to utilize the **Outline for Taking Notes** while watching the video lectures and then answer the **Review Questions** in preparation for the module quiz. As a trainer, make sure the students use these study guides as they go through the material each week.

3. Quizzes

Each module includes a **quiz** that will include multiple-choice, True/False, and matching questions. Once the student has watched the video, taken notes, and adequately studied the material, they will need to take the quiz, which has been designed to take about 20 minutes (one minute per question). In order to achieve a passing grade and have the quiz marked as "complete," they must receive a grade above 80%. If a student does not achieve at least 80% they may take the quiz again but must wait at least one hour before the quiz will open back up. We highly encourage the student to use that hour to study before taking the quiz again. They are allowed as many attempts as necessary until they receive a passing grade.

While this will ultimately be up to you as the trainer, we also encourage you to require students to adequately study and receive a passing grade on the quiz before they come to the weekly discussion meetings. This will ensure, at least in part, that they understand the course materials for that week and are prepared to talk about them with your group.

4. Discussion Guides

Up to this point, you might be saying to yourself, “Apart from keeping track of everyone, there’s not much for me to do *as a trainer...*” which is understandable. Much of what people associate with education is provided in the video lessons and quizzes themselves. But **Thirdmill** has always highly valued the face-to-face interaction that comes in discussion groups, and this is where you come in. With each module, we’ve included **Discussion Guides** that you will use to lead the conversation with your group each week regarding the lessons the students have just covered. And make no mistake, it is in these conversations where students will really cement the concepts from the lessons in their thinking and gain what they need to apply them to ministry and their relationship with God.

Each Discussion Guide contains two elements: **Discussion Questions** on the first page and a **Case Study** with a review statement and questions on the second page. As the trainer, you have **full freedom** to use *whatever components from the Discussion Guide you would like to* facilitate the discussion, which should last about **one hour to an hour and a half**. This can vary depending on needs, cultural context, and group size. Some weeks you might use one discussion question and the case study. Some weeks you might use a few discussion questions and that’s it. And some weeks you might use everything. The purpose of these guides is to provide you, as the trainer, a tool to facilitate good, healthy, robust conversation among your group members as they seek to better understand the concepts from the lesson. However you choose to utilize the Discussion Guides, make sure your students know that they are expected to have thought through and answered all of the discussion questions on the first page and should be ready to discuss them. In addition, it may be beneficial if they have read through the case study and are prepared to talk about it. It is not necessary that they have answered the questions on the case study prior to your group meeting as those are intended to be discussed together as a group.

One other note on group discussion, your role as the trainer includes the responsibility to make sure **everyone** in your group participates adequately. Some people talk more. Some people talk less. But if you find that one person dominates the conversation in such a way that others aren’t able to express their thoughts clearly or often enough, you need to find the most culturally appropriate way to correct that. At the same time, if many people in your group are naturally inclined to remain quiet and let others do the talking, it is up to you to give them the encouragement and freedom to share their thoughts with the group.

Final Exam

At the end of each course, we’ve included a 60-question **final exam** that covers the content of all lessons in that course. Like the quizzes, students must achieve at least 80% before the online classroom will mark the student as having “completed” the exam activity. And like the quizzes, they are free to take the exam as many times as needed in order to achieve that grade, with at least a one-hour time lapse between attempts.