

# Running with God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Jonah chapter 3 verses 1 through 10.

! Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days in breadth.

Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. And the people of Nineveh believed God.

They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, By the decree of the king and his nobles, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything.

[ 1 : 17 ] Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. And let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

Who knows? God may turn and relent, and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Please be seated. In 1983, 150 world-class runners came to Sydney, Australia, to compete in what was called the Westfield Sydney to Melbourne Ultra Marathon.

Most of the athletes who came were under 30 years old and were in prime physical condition. They would have to be, in order to make it through the five-day, 544-mile-long race.

If they were going to make it to the finish line and to receive the \$60,000 prize that awaited the winner. This race was regarded as one of the toughest and most physically demanding races in the world.

[ 2 : 41 ] The most shocking entrant into this race was a man named Cliff Young. It was shocking because of his physical condition.

Cliff Young was 61 years old. His skin clung tightly to his bones. He didn't have any teeth. He was wearing overalls and galoshes that were covering his work boots.

This man looked like he could be in no condition to run such a grueling race. Most people, when they thought it, were thinking, he must be joking, this must be some kind of a joke.

But Cliff Young wasn't laughing. Others were concerned that he would die over the course of this race. He looked like he was in no condition to endure such a grueling race.

But Cliff Young wasn't concerned. And so when the gun went off, there was Cliff Young, clad in overalls, work boots tied tight, galoshes pulled up snug over his boots, and he was racing towards the finish line.

[ 3 : 58 ] What a joke. Who is he fooling? And so, to no one's surprise, Cliff Young spent most of that first day in the back of the pack, just shuffling along.

All the runners were racing by him with their sculpted bodies. And it wasn't long before they were far ahead of him, never expecting that they would see this man in this race again.

And they were kind of right. They had long left him in the dust to be mocked by the spectators as they pressed on towards the goal.

After the race, people would come to find out a lot about Cliff Young. They would find out that he had spent most of his life on the farm. His family was poor.

They didn't own any cars. They didn't have any horses. So when the storms came rolling in, it was Cliff's job to go run out into the fields and gather in all of their sheep and all of their cows and corral them and herd them back to safety.

[ 5 : 02 ] And he would spend days doing that until all of the work was complete. Most of the runners participating in the ultramarathon operated on a schedule where they would run for 18 hours and sleep for six.

They would do this for five punishing days. To their surprise, the leaders of the pack woke up on day two and had found out that Cliff Young, this man who they were mocking, had passed them. You see, what had happened is Cliff Young didn't stop running that day. He didn't stop to sleep. He just kept on running. He just kept on going and going and going, stopping only for water and bathroom breaks.

And he did that for five days. When Cliff Young crossed the finish line, the next closest runner was almost 10 hours behind him.

And he set a new record for that race, completing it faster by almost nine hours than the previous record holder. This was amazing.

[ 6 : 17 ] Professional runners began studying Cliff's running style and many of them copied it thinking that it helped them more aerodynamically and it was more energy efficient.

This is a true story. There's this picture. Isn't that an amazing story? This man, against all odds, won this amazing race that nobody but maybe himself thought was possible.

The past couple of weeks, we've seen how Jonah has spent a lot of time running for God. And we've seen how that running from God has resulted for him.

And it hasn't been very good, right? Spoiler alert if you haven't been here for the past few weeks. It hasn't gone well for Jonah. Running from God never turns out well for anybody.

And again, we've got the entire Bible here that would tell us of that over and over again. Don't run from God. Running from God results in disaster. We see that all throughout Scripture.

[ 7 : 23 ] And I think that we all know this to be true, but from time to time, we decide to do our own thing anyway. I think every Christian can say, if they're being honest with themselves and if we're being honest with each other, that we've had a prodigal son moment where we felt like, you know what, God, I know more about this than you do.

Or, you know what, I don't even care what you have to say. I'm going to do my own thing. And we have this time where we spend thinking that we have outsmarted the Father.

And we've seen what happens when we run from God. But what happens when we run with God? For the first time in this book, Jonah is running with God instead of running from God.

And the results are amazing because God is able to use this one, disobedient, stubborn man with a heart full of hate towards these people who God has sent him to.

He has used this one man to change this entire city and bring it to its knees in repentance. Do you think that God could do that same thing today?

[ 8 : 42 ] Do you think that God could do that same thing today with you? Cliff Young didn't look like a champion, but he won the race.

He possessed inner qualities that could not be quantified. He had endurance, desire, perseverance, determination. All these certainly contributed to this man's outstanding victory.

And you may or may not possess these qualities, but let me tell you one thing, that if you are born again believer, you have something more precious than that. You have something more powerful than that.

You have the Holy Spirit of God living inside of you. If you will run with God, if we will run with God together as a church, people will be blessed.

People will be saved. God will be glorified. And your life will be full. Who wouldn't want that?

Romans 8, 11, the Apostle Paul says, If the Spirit of God, if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus Christ from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to you, life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

[ 10 : 00 ] Do you understand that? If you are a born again believer of Jesus Christ, the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus Christ from the dead is living inside of you.

And He's just waiting for you to run with God so that He can be unleashed in your life. And the world will be changed amazingly if that happens.

So there's a couple questions I want us to answer. Hopefully we've answered some of the questions of, you know, what does it mean to run with God? And we'll see more of that here in a second. But there are two questions that I want us to focus on today.

The first is this. How do we run with God? How do we run with God? And the second question is this one. Why should we run with God?

How do we run with God? Why should we run with God? These are questions that we will answer today as we dig through this scripture. So the first thing I want you to see is that running with God requires obedience.

[11:00] How do we run with God? Well, we must have obedience. That comes from verses 1 through 3. Let me read them to you again. The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, right? It came to him the second time because he disobeyed it the first time.

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

So in chapter 1, verse 3, we see that Jonah hears God calls, and he arises, but it's to run in the opposite direction. It's arising to leave a disobedience.

And now here we have Jonah in chapter 3, verse 3. He's heard the word of the Lord again, and he arises to go once more, but this time he arises to go to the place where God has called him to go. He's choosing to be obedient. And running with God requires our obedience. Obeying God means being fully committed to what God has asked you to do through his word.

[12:05] Obeying God means being fully committed to his plan, even when you think your plan is better, or even when you think God's plan is crazy.

There was a time when I was playing baseball in college, and I was a pitcher. And you know, pitchers want to strike out everybody. We don't care about the guys behind us. You know, we want to strike everybody out.

And so if you know much about baseball, you know that the best hitter on a team is who is third in their lineup. That's the best hitter. And so as a pitcher, there's kind of this pride and this ego thing, right?

I'm going to strike out your best player. Here's the thing about our team. Our coach was a former catcher and played for our school, and he knew a lot about calling a game.

He knew a lot about hitters' strengths and their weaknesses. And he would spend a lot of time gathering these scouting reports from our opponents, and he would go over those with our catchers the week before our game.

[13:10] And so they would sit together and they would get a game plan. And you've got to know that if you're going up against the team's best hitter, you're going to have a plan for how to get that guy out. And so the game came, and number three hitter comes up, and I'm thinking, I got him two strikes.

I don't remember. It's been a while. I don't remember the count. I just knew that I had a pitch to get him out with. And our catcher put down the number two, which is a curveball or an off-speed pitch. And that's lame. You know, I want to strike this guy out, and I want to do it with my fastball. And so I shake it off. I know what I'm doing, but I'm thinking, I'm better than this guy.

I can get this guy out. I will put a fastball low and away where he can't hit it, and he'll get out. I'll show you all. And so I throw the pitch, and the guy, the hitter's eyes, it was kind of one of those moments where just things were going in slow motion.

I saw his eyes just get real big. And he took this huge swing. In fact, he let out a grunt. He went, rawr! And he hit this ball. And it was one of those things where you just have whiplash.

[14:18] I knew it was out the moment I saw his eyes. He crushed that ball. He hit it over, he was left-handed, he hit it over the right field wall and over our football bleachers.

That's embarrassing. And so I knew what was going to happen. Catcher comes out to the mound, coach comes out to the mound, and he asks the catcher, what was the call?

Curveball. Okay, why'd you throw a fastball? I'm an idiot. That's why. Points his finger at me, don't do it again. Listen to what he's telling you to do.

And so I share that story because I think a lot of times when we're talking about our relationship with God, we feel like we know more than God. You don't know, God, how good I am at this, or you don't know how bad I would be if you had me to do that.

And so we think that we know more than God, but here's the thing, you'll never know more than God. God knows infinitely more than any of us will ever know.

[15:20] And so if he asks us to do something, in his word, he is asking us to do it. Not because he's trying to steal your joy, but to give you joy because he knows infinitely more than you or I could

ever know.

And so here, finally, Jonah experiences what it's like to run with God, and he's got to see that running with God, he's going to see, is much better than running from God.

D.L. Moody says that there will be no peace in any soul until it is willing to obey the voice of God. So being obedient to God means agreeing with God about what he says about sin, about what he says about your life, what he says in his word.

You are in agreement that God knows what's best. So running with God requires obedience. It also requires faith. Faith.

And verses, the rest of verse 3 and verse 4, Jonah is obedient to God, but he knows he's going to need faith to carry out this mission. And it says there, Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city. [16:30] Three days in breadth, and so Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Running with God requires faith in God's call.

God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and to call out against it the message that he gives him to tell them. Remember, again, this city is full of incredibly wicked people who do incredibly wicked things. And it wouldn't have been much to them to think, you know, Jonah, you're this stranger. You're telling us we're going to die. We're going to kill you. It wouldn't have been much for them to do something like that.

Could you imagine if God asked you to do that? Where would you begin? Okay, I'm going to go into this town. I'm going to tell these people that they've got to repent or they're going to die. That's kind of scary, I think.

What will the people say? What will the people think of me? Are you sure that you have the right person here? On my 21st birthday, I was taking, me and my dad took a man's trip to Cooperstown, New York to see the Hall of Fame.

[17:48] And if you've ever been there before, it's a pretty neat place for many reasons. But the Hall of Fame is actually, a part of it is a hall. It's a big room and it's got plaques of all the different great players and coaches and people who have contributed to the game of baseball in amazing ways.

And on each plaque, there's a picture of their face and they list off all the statistics. This is why this person is here. And it's an awesome place to go as a sports fan. And so when we come to Hebrews chapter 11, I'm often reminded of walking through the Baseball Hall of Fame.

That here in Hebrews chapter 11, we see people who have accomplished greater things than hitting a baseball. They have been doing things or have done things that have been accomplished by God working in their life despite their flaws.

They were people who God had used because they had great faith. Hebrews chapter 11, verses 1 through 2. Look at it with me. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the convictions of things not seen.

For by it, people of old receive their condemnation. And then he goes through all of these people. And then in chapter 12, verses 1 through 2, he says this. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

[19:24] And so we see here that the author of Hebrews is presenting this image to us. We're the ones in the race and surrounding this race. In the stands are all those who have run it before.

All these great saints, all these great men and women whom God has used to do amazing things. And they are saying to us, keep on going. Keep on running.

It is worth it. You will not regret it. Don't turn back. Don't give up. Don't slow down. Keep on going. So we see that running with God requires faith in what God has called us to do.

Running with God also requires faith in the message that God has given us to share. Jonah had faith in God's message. In fact, that's why he ran in the first place, if you'll remember.

He knew that God sending him would result in the salvation for the Ninevites. Look at chapter 4, verses 1 and 2. Jonah says, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?

[20:28] That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

You see, Jonah had faith in the message of God. He knew that this message would deliver the Ninevites, that they would be saved, but he had a lot of issues. But faith in God's message was not one of Jonah's issues.

Unfortunately, and tragically for us, Christians today, there are a lot of Christ followers who, though they wouldn't admit it, by the way that they lived their lives, it would seem that they have lost faith in the power of the message of the gospel.

even becoming so ashamed of it that they couldn't think to tell somebody who they know is lost that if they don't receive Christ as their Lord and Savior, they're going to spend their eternity in hell.

When we were waiting in the airport to come back from Florida about a month ago, I picked up a Sports Illustrated and I read an article and there was a well-known and famous athlete who was being interviewed.

[ 21 : 49 ] And one of the questions that the interviewer was talking to him about was his faith, that he had been going through some struggles with his faith. And so he talked about as a boy growing up in the church, going every Sunday with mom and dad, but he had this real issue with hell.

He couldn't understand it. He couldn't comprehend it. It caused a lot of questions for him. He didn't like the thought that such a place existed. I don't like the thought that such a place exists.

And so he talks about someone who came along and helped him later on in his life as a professional athlete and that person's name is Rob Bell. Some of you guys know who I'm talking about.

Rob Bell wrote a book called Love Wins where he basically tried to erase hell. But here's the problem. You can't erase hell because it's a real factual place.

But what was tragic is this athlete was talking about the fact that this conversation that he had with Rob Bell alleviated some of the issues that he had. It made him feel more comfortable thinking that the people that he knew who didn't follow his faith would not meet such a tragic end.

[ 23 : 08 ] But again, hear me, belief in a lie does not make it true. In 1 Kings chapter 18, many of you guys remember the prophet Elijah.

And he's going to have a showdown with the prophets of Baal or Baal. And they are at Mount Carmel. And there's going to be two sacrifices.

Many of you have heard the stories. And Elijah, being, I guess, the gentleman that he was says, you know what? You guys go first. And so here was the challenge. We're going to call out to our God and whoever's God answers, that's going to be the determination of whose God is greater.

And so Elijah is one man and the prophets of Baal are many. And if you remember the prophets of Baal, they believed, I believe, that Baal was going to show up.

And they cried out to him. And they even would cut themselves. You know, come on, do something. This is your chance. And nothing happened.

[ 24 : 14 ] And then Elijah, if you remember, says, pour water everywhere, all over my sacrifice. Right? I want you to see something that's going to be astounding. And sure enough, God answers and he lights that thing on fire and it evaporates.

They believed, the prophets of Baal, that Baal was going to answer them. But belief in a lie, no matter how much you believe it, does not make it true.

Here's the thing. People in the world know that things are broken with this world. We all know that things aren't the way that they're supposed to be. But the issue is how we go about trying to fix what ails us.

And so people will turn to politics, they'll turn to self-help books, they'll turn to all different kinds of things, drugs, alcohol, you name it, to try to fix what's broken within them, to try to fix what's broken outside of them.

But as Christians, we know that we have the solution. It's the gospel. That's what will fix what has been broken.

[ 25 : 21 ] Romans 1, 16 through 17, the Apostle Paul says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.

As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. What would happen if we truly believed that this was the truth?

That this gospel that we come here and we listen to, that we preach, actually can bring these kind of results. So now we understand that we have obedience, we have faith, those are like our running

shoes as we're running with God, so now we've got to focus on the next question. What would happen if we did? What would happen if we truly believed this message could have this great of an impact? Here's the thing again about Jonah.

Jonah is the world's worst missionary. Isn't he? He is the world's worst missionary. You think if Jonah lived today and he was going to interview with the IMB or with Nam and they asked him about God's call and he's like, yeah, I want to go but I've got to tell you, I hate the people that you want to send me to.

[ 26 : 38 ] I don't want to go there. Please don't send me to those people. You know what they would do? They'd be like, they'd kick him out the door, see you later, right? Next one up.

Jonah was the world's worst missionary. He had no desire to go. He had no love for these people. He had no concern for them or care for them. Yet God achieved some incredible results through him despite all that.

That should give us some great encouragement, shouldn't it? The world's worst missionary was used by God to achieve some amazing results.

When we run with God, we live in obedience, we live by faith, we open our mouths and we share the gospel and the results of all of that are then left up to God and we've got to understand that if you are doing that, you are not able to fail.

John MacArthur says, pagan sailors in a pagan city responded to the reluctant prophet showing the power of God in spite of the weakness of his servant. running with God inspires others to run.

[ 27 : 51 ] Verse 5, And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast. They put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them. Now notice what it says.

It says that they believed God. Jonah was the messenger. Jonah had the message. But it doesn't say that they believed Jonah. It says that they believed God.

Why? Because they understood that this message was not from man, but it was divine. This message produced change in these people.

They were made aware of their sin. They understood that they needed to be forgiven. And they knew that things must change. And they wanted to change.

And so they put on sackcloth and ashes. And basically that's exactly what it was. Think potato sacks that you cut a hole in for your head and your arms. You put that thing on and you sit in a pile of ashes and you take some and you plop it on your head.

[ 28 : 58 ] Why would they do that? Well, they were doing that to express their humility. They were doing that to express their need for forgiveness. It wasn't this act that caused God to forgive them, but it was the humility that they demonstrated in such an action.

God's forgiveness in response to genuine repentance is celebrated by David's words in Psalm 30, 11 where he writes, You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy. This message, this divine message that God had to spend through his terrible missionary changed people's life.

It inspired them to have faith and to run too. And there in verse 9 they say, the king says, Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger so that we may not perish.

Jonah's obedience and faith means that he is now running with God and now as a result of his running with God, the people of Nineveh want to run with him too.

And so when I think of that, it reminds me of one of my favorite movie series, Rocky. Rocky.

[ 30 : 13 ] Five's not so good, but one and two are great. And if you remember in Rocky number two, he's training and he's running to that museum, remember, where he climbs the steps and he jumps around.

And if you remember that movie, as he takes off from his apartment, he goes through town and people are watching him run and they know why he's running and these kids start following him and they start cheering him on and they're cheering him on and all of these people are following Rocky to the museum steps and he outruns that final last kid.

But then at the last, they're all up there celebrating together. They were inspired. When we run with God, people are inspired by what they see. And they want to run with us too.

2 Corinthians 2, verse 15, For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one, a fragrance from death to death to the other, a fragrance from life to life.

So we've got to understand that yes, we will inspire people when we run with God, but we will make other people angry. To some people who are perishing, they see what we're doing and they're

amazed.

[ 31 : 24 ] And they say, yeah, these Christians believe. They practice what they preach. Why do they love each other so much? That's weird. They care about each other so much.

They don't know each other and they're not related to each other by blood. Why do they do these things? Why do they spend their weekends volunteering in shelters in different missions?

Why do they give their lives to go to places where people are afraid to go? and they see something that inspires them. And to other people, we just stink.

But that's okay. Because we're testifying to them that their sin is real. And they know that they need Jesus Christ.

Running with God inspires people. Running with God impacts our community. And so the word reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne.

[ 32 : 23 ] He removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. He issued this decree and at the end he says, who knows, God may turn and relent from his fierce anger. And so we've got to understand this.

The king, the guy in power here, this message has reached him. And you've got to think as wicked as his people were, he must be equally, if not doubly, more wicked.

God's message has a way of turning people's lives that we never thought capable of being turned. And now he's calling on the people to pray and he's calling on the people to change.

And I'm telling you that if it can happen in Nineveh, it can happen in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. It can happen anywhere in the world for that matter. When people see us running with God, they will no longer be able to suppress the truth that God has placed inside of every single one of our hearts.

I want to close with one last story. About a month or two before our coming here, many of you are aware we took a mission trip with a group of our teens and we went to Minnesota.

[ 33 : 40 ] And one of our kids that we brought, we'd been praying a long time for. She'd come to our church for about a year with her grandparents. Her mother and her father were not in her life. And we were excited that she was coming.

Not saved, but excited that she was coming because we were praying that God would reach her and that she would be saved as a result of this trip and as a result of her seeing how Christians live out the gospel.

And it was, I think it was the second to last night we were there. And you got to understand this girl, she, I don't think she had anything in her wardrobe that wasn't the color black.

She wore black just about everywhere. She wore black eye shadow and she hung out with some people that her grandfather told me they were very concerned about. And so she came and she kind of was aloof.

You know, she, I could tell that she was watching what she was seeing. You know, are these people really about what they're about or not? And she brought her guitar and she was excited to play at worship each night that we were gathered there.

[ 34 : 47 ] But she would get down from worship and when it was devotion time she would always kind of sit away from everybody else. And so this night one of the leaders there was encouraging us to share ways in which they'd seen God at work in their day.

And so one of the other leaders pointed out our girl, this girl that I'm talking to you and he said, you know, I'm just amazed by how hard she's working on these songs that she's preparing and he was just lifting her up.

And everybody turned to her and she was sitting far away and everybody turned to her and just clapped. And you could see, you couldn't see it but you could just, you could feel all of those walls, all of those walls of resistance were coming down and the Holy Spirit was working in her heart.

And that night she grabbed my wife and she says, I want to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And they went out and they prayed and I've been concerned because I, you know, it's hard whenever you lead, you're discipling somebody and it's time for you to go and you almost have this thought, you know, God, what's going to happen to them now?

As if we were needed for their salvation, right? The Holy Spirit is much greater than you and I. But I've been watching her on Facebook and to see what she's doing now.

[ 36 : 25 ] She's involved in ROTC. She won this competition. And even just looking at her face, she seems like a completely different person. You know why? She is. She is.

She was inspired by what she saw. She was impacted by the gospel. This message does this today. People need to hear it.

People will be impacted by it. And so my hope and my prayer for our church is that people won't just hear the gospel from us, but they will see the gospel lived out in us.

And I heard this quote. It's an awesome quote by a guy with an awesome name. His name is C.T. Studd. What a great name, right?

If ever I was going to change my name, C.T. Studd would be probably my number one option. But he said this, and I hope this is true for me and I'm praying it'll be true for you. I pray that when I die, all hell will have a party to celebrate the fact that I am no longer in the fight.

[ 37 : 30 ] Amen? I pray that when I die, all hell will have a party to celebrate the fact that I am no longer in the fight. Let's fight. Let's have an impact.

Let's change things, not for ourselves, but for the glory of Jesus Christ. It'll happen. It can happen. But we've got to be obedient.

We've got to have faith. And then we've got to go out there and we've got to allow people to see it and hear it. If you're in here this morning and you're hearing and seeing this for the first time, let me tell you that God loves you.

God has a plan for your life. And it's hurting and breaking His heart to see what sin is doing to you. To know that if you do not receive the gift of His Son, the life He gave in your place, the blood that He shed for you, it's breaking His heart to see what sin is doing to you.

And He wants nothing more than for you to receive the payment that has been made for your sins. And you can do that today. You can come forward in a moment.

[ 38 : 49 ] I'll be standing here. I'd be glad to pray for you. Or you can just pray by yourself. There's places to pray. If you're a Christian and you are convicted because you think, you know what?

I have not believed, Lord, that the gospel is able to do all that Your Word says that it's doing. And you want to come here today and and decide that you're going to agree with God.

You know, God, I'm committing myself. I want to be like C.T. Studd. I want to be a person who the people in hell will celebrate the fact that I'm no longer in the fight. Thank you.