Question: What does it mean to “row with oars”?

An oar is a tool used to move a boat through the water by rowing. The plural is oars. Oars are long, paddle-like instruments that sailors or rowers use to push against the water and move a vessel forward. They are essential when there is no wind for sailing or when navigating through rough waters.

In Jonah 1:13, we read:

> “Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before.”

In this verse, the sailors were desperately trying to save themselves and Jonah by rowing back to shore. But no matter how hard they tried, their human effort wasn’t enough—the storm only became more violent. The original Hebrew word translated as “row” literally means “to dig,” suggesting just how strenuous and desperate their efforts were.

Human Effort vs. Divine Will

This moment in the story of Jonah highlights a profound theological truth: human effort is limited when it's outside of God's will. The sailors tried everything they could to avoid throwing Jonah overboard, but God had already determined the course of action. Their struggle teaches us that our strength, wisdom, or good intentions cannot override God's purposes.

This echoes what we find in:

- Proverbs 19:21 – *"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."*
- Psalm 127:1– *"Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain."*

The sailors weren't wicked men—they were trying to do the right thing. But even righteous effort must be surrendered to God's sovereign plan.

Other Bible References About Oars and Rowing

- Mark 6:48 – *"He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them..."*
  → Even Jesus' disciples experienced struggle when rowing against forces beyond their control—until Jesus showed up and brought peace.

- John 6:19 – *“When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water…”*
  → Again, we see that human effort takes us only so far—until Jesus meets us in the storm.
- Isaiah 33:21 and Ezekiel 27:6 also reference boats and oars in poetic and prophetic imagery.

Takeaway: Surrender Is Stronger Than Struggle

Jonah’s story reminds us that there are times when letting go and surrendering to God’s will is more powerful than rowing harder. Whether it’s a decision, a hardship, or a storm in life, we must ask ourselves:
Am I rowing against God’s will, or am I trusting His direction?

Take time to read Jonah chapter 1 and reflect on your own storms. Are you relying on your own strength, or are you seeking God’s will above all?

Shalom.

JIUNGE NA GROUP LETU LA WHATSAPP HAPA >> WHATSAPP GROUP….

Share on:

WhatsApp