

They Have Not Prevailed

PSALM 129 (WEB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

Whatever has been grinding away at you for years didn't finish you off, and the reason isn't that you're tough. It's that God is righteous and He keeps cutting the ropes your enemies keep tying, so you can count the scars honestly and still sing.

Opening Lines

There's a kind of pain that doesn't come once and leave. It comes back, year after year, from as far back as you can remember, and it leaves marks you can trace with your finger. That's the pain this song is about, and the shocking thing is what it dares to say next.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to name a long, repeated affliction out loud and finish the sentence 'they have not prevailed against me.' The scars are real; the win is that they're still here to sing.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the deep dive on the four cross-reference passages if time is short. Keep Exodus 1 as the one anchor for 'from my youth.'
- Where the moment lives: In the moment a person says the harm and God's faithfulness in the same breath, out loud, without pretending the wound was small. That's the whole psalm in miniature.
- Your prep: Sit with your own 'plowed on my back' story before class so you're not improvising it live. Know Exodus 1:13-14 cold as the historical root of 'from my youth.'

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening (plow image), 4 min. Read Psalm 129 aloud, 3 min. Teach charash with the finger-drag on the table, 6 min. Exodus 1:13-14 as the root of 'from my youth,' 4 min. Questions 1-3 in the full room, 15 min. Question 5 exercise done silently on the handout, then two or three volunteers say their 'yet' sentence aloud, 10 min. Big idea + close, 3 min. Transformation lives in question 5 said out loud. If short, cut question 4 and the cross-reference detail.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening (yes/no on the recurring thing), 6 min. Read the psalm, 3 min. Teach charash briefly, 5 min. Questions 1 through 4, 22 min, letting people go deep. Question 5

exercise: everyone writes, then each person says their 'yet' sentence around the circle, 15 min — hold the silence. Big idea + spontaneous prayer over what was named, 9 min. Transformation lives in the go-around confession. If short, drop question 2.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening (oldest hurt) as the way in, 5 min. Read the psalm together off a phone, 2 min. Skip straight to questions 3 and 5, 15 min — this is the whole point at a table. Each of you says 'this hurt me, and yet I am still here,' 5 min. Big idea and a plain prayer over what your friends said, 3 min. Transformation lives in saying the sentence to a friend's face.

The Follow-Up Text

The follow-up text is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. Remember week 5, when you sent one person a message after class picking up something they'd said? Level up now. This week, before you even walk into the room, look at your roster and find the person who has been present but genuinely quiet for three straight sessions — not absent, present and silent. A person can fade out for a month inside a room that never noticed. Their silence is information. Do two things: (1) plan one specific question this week that only that person could answer, built from what you know of their life or work, and route it to them gently in the room — 'Marcus, you've worked construction — what does it do to you to hear the plow described on someone's back?' (2) After class, text that same person one line naming what their answer added. A question that honors what someone uniquely brings pulls them back into the room better than any amount of general warmth.

Why This Passage Matters

Most of the Songs of Ascent so far have handed the pilgrim comfort, gladness, rest. This one hands them a scar and tells them to sing over it. That makes Psalm 129 rare and precious for a room full of real people, because everybody in front of you is carrying something long. Not the fresh wound they'll tell you about, but the old one — the affliction 'from my youth up,' the thing that's been plowing the same furrow for years and shows no sign of stopping. This psalm doesn't tell them to get over it. It counts the furrows. It says the plow was real, the strokes were long, and then it refuses to give the plow the last word: 'yet they have not prevailed against me.' That's not denial and it's not cheap positivity. It's a nation looking back over Egypt, Babylon, and every master since, and noticing that every empire that carved into her is gone and she's still on the road, still singing. You get to stand in front of people who feel harrowed thin and hand them a song three thousand years old that says the same wound they carry did not win. Few things you teach will matter more than that.

Catch the Fire First

Before the room does the central exercise, do it yourself this week, on paper, alone. Finish

the sentence the Apply card gives: 'This hurt me, and yet I am still here.' Pick something genuinely long — a grief or a struggle that goes back years, not last Tuesday's annoyance. Say it slowly, out loud, in an empty room. Notice how much it costs to name the harm honestly before you get to the 'yet.' If you rush to the 'yet' to make yourself feel better, you've skipped the psalm. Feel the weight of both halves in one breath. When you can do that without flinching, you'll know how to hold the silence when a person in your room does it, and you won't rescue them out of it too fast.

Bring Your Own Story

- A long affliction 'from your youth up' — one that came back again and again, not a one-time blow — and the honest 'yet I am still here.'
- A time you watched an opponent or a fear that felt permanent turn out to be grass on the housetops: loud, fast, and rootless, gone in a season.
- A moment someone blessed you when you'd been quietly afflicted and nobody had noticed — or a time you wish someone had.
- SAMPLE (polished vs real): Polished — 'God brought me through a difficult period and I emerged stronger in my faith.' Real — 'It came back every autumn for eleven years, and I stopped expecting it to end. I'm still here. I don't fully know why.'
- Guardrail: tell it raw and unresolved, not sanded into a testimony with a bow on it — the psalm doesn't tie its bow either.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "A plow cuts long, parallel gouges through a field, furrow beside furrow. Now picture those same lines carved across a human back by a whip. That's the image at the dead center of this psalm, and the poet chose it on purpose. Hold that picture. Everything the song says next is spoken from underneath the blade."

Concrete image before abstract idea — let them see the plow before they hear the theology.

SMALL GROUP: "Go around and answer just this, quickly: is there something in your life that has come back again and again for years — not a one-time hit, but a thing that keeps plowing the same line? Don't explain it yet. Just say yes or no. Almost everyone will say yes. That's the room this psalm was written for."

Name the shared experience first so nobody feels alone naming it.

COFFEE: "What's the oldest hurt you're still carrying? Not the newest one. The one that goes back the furthest. This little song is about exactly that, and it says something surprising about it."

One disarming question that goes straight to the psalm's nerve.

Teaching the Word

The word to teach is the Hebrew *charash* — to plow, to cut in, to engrave. It's the word behind 'The plowers plowed on my back. They made their furrows long.' A plowman doesn't scratch the surface. He drives the blade deep and drags it the whole length of the field, and what's left is a permanent line in the ground. Here's the physical image: put your palm flat on the table and drag one finger slowly across it from edge to edge, pressing down. That drag, that whole length, that pressure — that's *charash*. Not a slap. A long cut that changes the surface for good. This is why the psalm doesn't pretend the wound was small; the word won't let it. But look what the same God does two lines later: 'He has cut apart the cords of the wicked.' The plow cut deep and long, and then the righteous God cut the rope. The last cut belongs to Him. Say this line and then stop talking: 'yet they have not prevailed against me.'

Discussion Questions

1. The psalm says the affliction came 'from my youth up' — from the very beginning. Why does it matter that this isn't a fresh wound but an old, repeated one?

Coaching note: Let them feel the difference between a one-time crisis and a lifelong pattern. The psalm is deliberately about the long thing. Don't let them jump to 'but God is good' yet.

If it stalls: Is there a difference between a bad thing that happens once and a bad thing that keeps coming back? Which one is harder to keep faith through?

2. 'The plowers plowed on my back.' The poet could have said 'they hurt me.' Why this image instead?

Coaching note: Draw out the physicality — deep, long, permanent, done for someone else's harvest. Tie it to *charash* if you taught the word. The scars stay even after the plowman leaves.

If it stalls: What does a plowed field look like the day after — is it back to normal, or is it changed? What does that tell you about how the poet feels about his scars?

3. Right in the middle of the wounds, the psalm declares 'Yahweh is righteous. He has cut apart the cords of the wicked.' How do you say something like that while the scars are still fresh?

Coaching note: This is the heart of the psalm — naming harm and God's faithfulness in the same breath. Don't let anyone resolve the tension too neatly. Hold both halves.

If it stalls: Have you ever believed something was true about God while you still felt terrible? What did that look like?

4. The enemies are pictured as 'grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up.' What is the psalm claiming about what opposes God's people — and do you actually believe it about the thing pressing on you?

Coaching note: This is where it gets personal. The claim is that opposition has shallow roots and can't draw the water it needs. Ask the second half honestly and wait.

If it stalls: Name one thing that felt permanent five years ago that's now completely gone. Does that change how you see what's pressing on you today?

5. Finish this sentence out loud: 'This hurt me, and yet I am still here.' What's the 'this' for you, and what does it cost you to say the 'yet'?

Coaching note: This is the exercise. Go first if you did the Catch the Fire prep. Then hold real silence — count to fifteen. Do not rescue them. The transformation is in the saying, not your commentary.

If it stalls: You don't have to name the hurt out loud. Just say the four words: 'and yet I am still here.' Can you say those?

Questions You May Hear

"Who is the 'me' talking? Is this one person's suffering or the whole nation's?"

It's the whole nation speaking as one — the psalm even says 'Let Israel now say.' 'From my youth' means Israel's infancy back in Egypt, under Pharaoh's taskmasters, and every oppressor since: Canaan, Philistia, Assyria, Babylon.

"Isn't wishing your enemies 'be turned backward' un-Christian? It sounds vindictive."

The psalm isn't plotting revenge; it's handing judgment to the righteous God instead of taking it. The wish is that those who hate Zion wither like rootless grass — that God, not the sufferer, has the last word on them.

"What's the deal with 'grass on the housetops'? I don't picture grass on a roof."

Flat mud-and-thatch roofs would sprout stray grass in the shallow dirt, but with no soil depth it withered before harvest — a reaper couldn't even fill his hand from it. It's the perfect picture of opposition that looks alive but has no roots to last.

"Does this psalm point to Jesus at all, or is it only about Israel?"

It reaches past Israel to the true Servant whose back was given to those who struck Him — Isaiah's Servant, scourged at a Roman post. The furrows plowed Christ's back, death's cords bound Him, and the righteous God cut them apart on the third morning.

For Experienced Leaders

- When someone names a genuinely old wound, resist filling the pause with theology. The silence after 'and yet I am still here' is doing the work; your voice would interrupt it.
- Watch the person who says the harm but never the 'yet' — they may not be ready to, and that's fine. Note them for the follow-up text rather than pushing them in the room.
- Don't let the class turn 'grass on the housetops' into a debate about whether it's okay to want enemies to fail. Redirect to the real point: the sufferer is handing the verdict to God instead of carrying it.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Before you leave, say out loud one thing you'll do this week: either finish 'this hurt me, and yet I am still here' about something specific, or name one person you'll bless who's been quietly afflicted. Not a plan to plan — an actual sentence.

Close by praying out loud over the specific 'yet I am still here' sentences people actually said — name the real hurts they named, and thank God plainly that they weren't

crushed. Don't reach for a written prayer; saying their own words back to God is the whole point.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 3 because someone opened up, stay there. The confession of harm-and-faithfulness in the same breath is the lesson. Don't march to question 5 to finish the sheet.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, text the person who was quiet for three sessions the specific question you planned for them, and text anyone who named a raw 'yet' sentence a simple line: 'The blessing of Yahweh be on you' — be the passerby the psalm mourns nobody being.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/psalms/129/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- The oldest hurt you're still carrying — the one that goes back the furthest, in a word or two:
- Finish it: 'This hurt me, and yet I am still here.' Write the 'this':
- 'Grass on the housetops withers before it grows up.' Name one thing that felt permanent years ago and is now gone:
- One person you know who has been quietly afflicted, whom nobody has blessed:
- The line to keep this week: 'Yahweh is righteous. He has cut apart the cords of the wicked.' What rope do you need Him to cut?

Take-home actions:

- Sit down this week and finish the sentence slowly, out loud or in writing: 'This hurt me, and yet I am still here.' Count the wound honestly, then refuse to let it have the last word.
- When discouragement hits this afternoon, remember the grass on the roof: what opposes you has shallow roots and can't draw the water it needs to last. God can outlast it, and in Him, so can you.
- Message one friend who has been quietly afflicted and simply speak a blessing: 'The blessing of Yahweh be on you.' Be the passerby the psalm mourns nobody being.

You have not been crushed, because Christ was crushed in your place and rose.