

*If you think your environment excuses you from following Jesus, think again.*

Many people believe that their circumstances prevent them from becoming true disciples of Christ. You might say:

*“I was born into a religion that opposes Christianity. How can I become a follower of Jesus—especially one who denies themselves daily to follow Him? I’m married to someone who rejects Christ. My whole family doesn’t believe in Jesus or even respect the Christian faith. Is it really possible for me to go to church, serve God, and live as a faithful believer?”*

The answer is YES.

It is entirely possible if you are willing to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23).

You’re not the first to face a hostile environment. Throughout the Bible, there were people who encountered even more difficult

situations than yours. Some overcame, and some did not. Let's examine both.

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1. Those Who Failed to Follow Openly

John 12:42 (ESV):

“Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue.”

Here we see Jewish leaders who genuinely believed in Jesus—but they remained silent. They feared being expelled from the synagogue and rejected by their community. Their secret faith bore no fruit, because they were unwilling to confess Christ publicly.

Jesus Himself warned against such hidden faith:

Matthew 10:32–33 (ESV):

“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

Fear of man kept them from full devotion to Christ. This is a sobering warning for anyone tempted to stay silent because of societal or religious pressure.

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## 2. Those Who Overcame the Pressure

Thankfully, the Bible also gives us powerful examples of men and women who were in extremely difficult situations—yet they chose to follow Jesus boldly. Two such people are:

- Joanna, the wife of Chuza, an official in Herod’s court.
- Manaen, a close associate and foster brother of Herod.

Joanna: A Courageous Disciple in the Palace of a Tyrant

Joanna was married to Chuza, the household manager (steward) of King Herod. Herod's dynasty was notorious for persecuting God's people:

- Herod the Great tried to kill baby Jesus by ordering the slaughter of infant boys (Matthew 2:16).
- Herod Antipas, his son, had John the Baptist beheaded (Matthew 14:10).
- Herod Agrippa, his grandson, killed James and tried to execute Peter (Acts 12:1-3).

Being part of Herod's household meant being surrounded by hostility toward the Gospel. Yet Joanna, knowing the dangers, chose to become a disciple of Jesus—not secretly, but openly.

Luke 8:1-3 (ESV):

“Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.”

Joanna supported Jesus’ ministry both spiritually and financially. Her courage and generosity were expressions of deep faith and devotion. She risked her life by openly aligning herself with Jesus.

Her example reminds us that discipleship may cost us safety, reputation, or relationships—but the reward is eternal glory.

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Manaen: A Prophet from the Palace

Acts 13:1 (ESV):

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”

Manaen was raised alongside Herod Antipas—likely as a foster brother. They grew up in the same environment, had similar influences, and shared the same palace. But when Manaen heard the Gospel, he made a different choice. Instead of siding with power and politics, he chose Christ and was eventually recognized as a prophet and teacher in the early church.

This is a profound testimony: Two men raised under the same roof—one a persecutor of God’s servants, the other a servant of the Living God.

Manaen is a powerful example that your background does not determine your destiny. God can call and use anyone—even from the most unlikely of places—if they are willing to follow Him wholeheartedly.

Conclusion: What's Holding You Back?

If Joanna and Manaen could follow Jesus from within the household of Herod—a family known for opposing Christ—what excuse do we have?

These two will rise in the judgment and stand as witnesses against anyone who claimed their situation was “too difficult” to follow Jesus (cf. Matthew 12:41-42). If you're married to a non-believer, or live in a home where Christ is rejected, don't be ashamed. Proclaim your faith. Follow Jesus. Deny yourself. Be bold.

*“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

(Matthew 16:25, ESV)

Like Joanna and Manaen, choose Christ—even when it costs you everything. He will honor those who honor Him (1 Samuel 2:30).

**Maranatha — Come, Lord Jesus!**

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