

You're Winning

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James 4:7 says, *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”* As we grow, learn, adapt, and become mature disciples, it inevitably causes conflict with Satan’s attempts at our spiritual undoing. It can be hard some times to know if we are winning the battle against temptation, though. Change can be subtle, so what are some indications that I’m on the right track, so to speak?

When Satan Makes You Feel Like A Hypocrite

The devil tries to downplay and trivialize our attempts at self-control, patience, love, and service by excusing them as nothing more than play-acting, seeing that we are less than enthusiastic about them. He tries to make us feel like hypocrites (“if you aren’t going to serve with all your heart, you might as well not serve at all”). But this is not hypocrisy, since it should be rather obvious that nobody starts out with a virtue at 100% strength. The very fact that we are told that the Christian life is one of growth should inform us that everyone has room to improve.

- *“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 3:18).
- *“And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another”* (1 Thessalonians 3:12).
- *“That, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more”* (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

You Are Actively “Putting On” Virtuous Behaviors

In order to become the great Christians we ought to be, we have to put on the right things (demeanor, character, speech). We cannot wait around for God to put it on for us. At first, these things may feel unnatural or awkward, just like a new shirt, new shoes, new car, new house, or a new job. But you may wake up one day and realize that they have become as much a part of you as your very body. You have to work past the stage of discomfort if you ever want to make real spiritual progress.

- *“Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light”* (Romans 13:12).
- *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 13:14).
- *“That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self... and put on the new self”* (Ephesians 4:22,24).
- *“Put on the full armor of God”* (Ephesians 6:11).
- *“Put them all aside... And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity”* (Colossians 3:8,14).

Growth Will Sneak Up On You

It is difficult to see the way our children grow when we are around them every day. But ask a relative who only sees them once a year, and the change is dramatic! So, too, is our spiritual growth. We may not feel like we are changing, improving, or adding qualities to

our character, so only an objective witness can attest to how far we have come. We need to stop and celebrate our little victories when they come (and surround ourselves with mature Christians who can give us an honest assessment of our growth), and take notice of the obvious growth of those around us. Tell a Christian that you have noticed a marked improvement in their attendance, demeanor, or parenting. Let our young people know when they have done something admirable. Like so many things in life, positive affirmation is one of the most powerful methods of ensuring that good habits and attitude continue.

- Take time to enjoy your victory over a sinful habit;
- Every time, no matter how inconsequential, that you control your tongue;
- Even the slightest turn of the head away from sin;
- Controlling our tempers in situations that used to make us blow up;
- You did a difficult thing that a year ago was seen as impossible;
- Moving on after a discouraging moment.