




Congregational Life Cycle

BIRTH

DEATH





**every living thing
has a
natural life cycle**

The Cycle begins at Birth



BIRTH/EARLY GROWTH

■ Potential

■ Purpose and Vision
(assumed or stated) — DNA

■ Constant Care/Protection

Birth is followed by a period of Growth

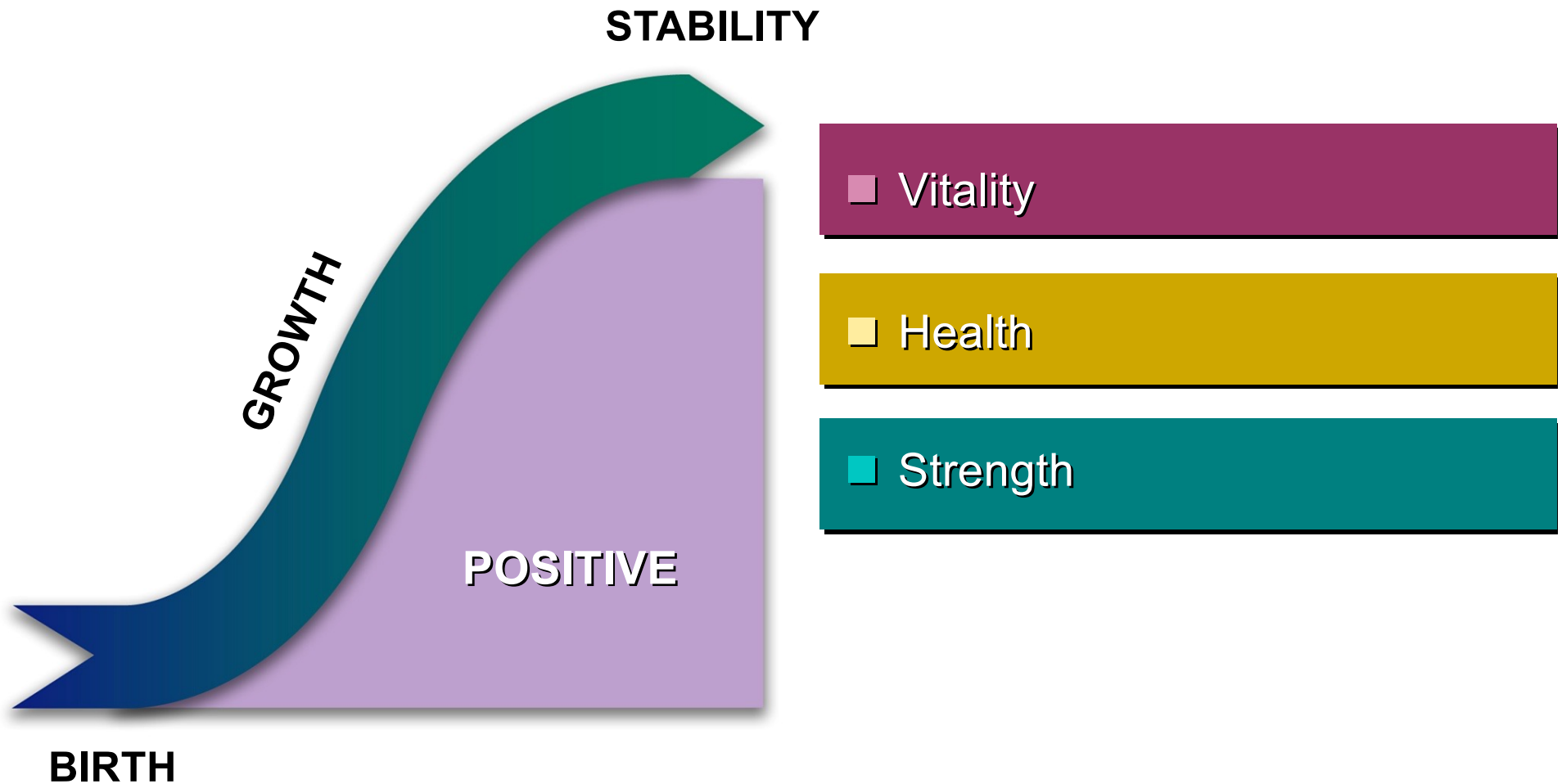


■ Energy and Excitement

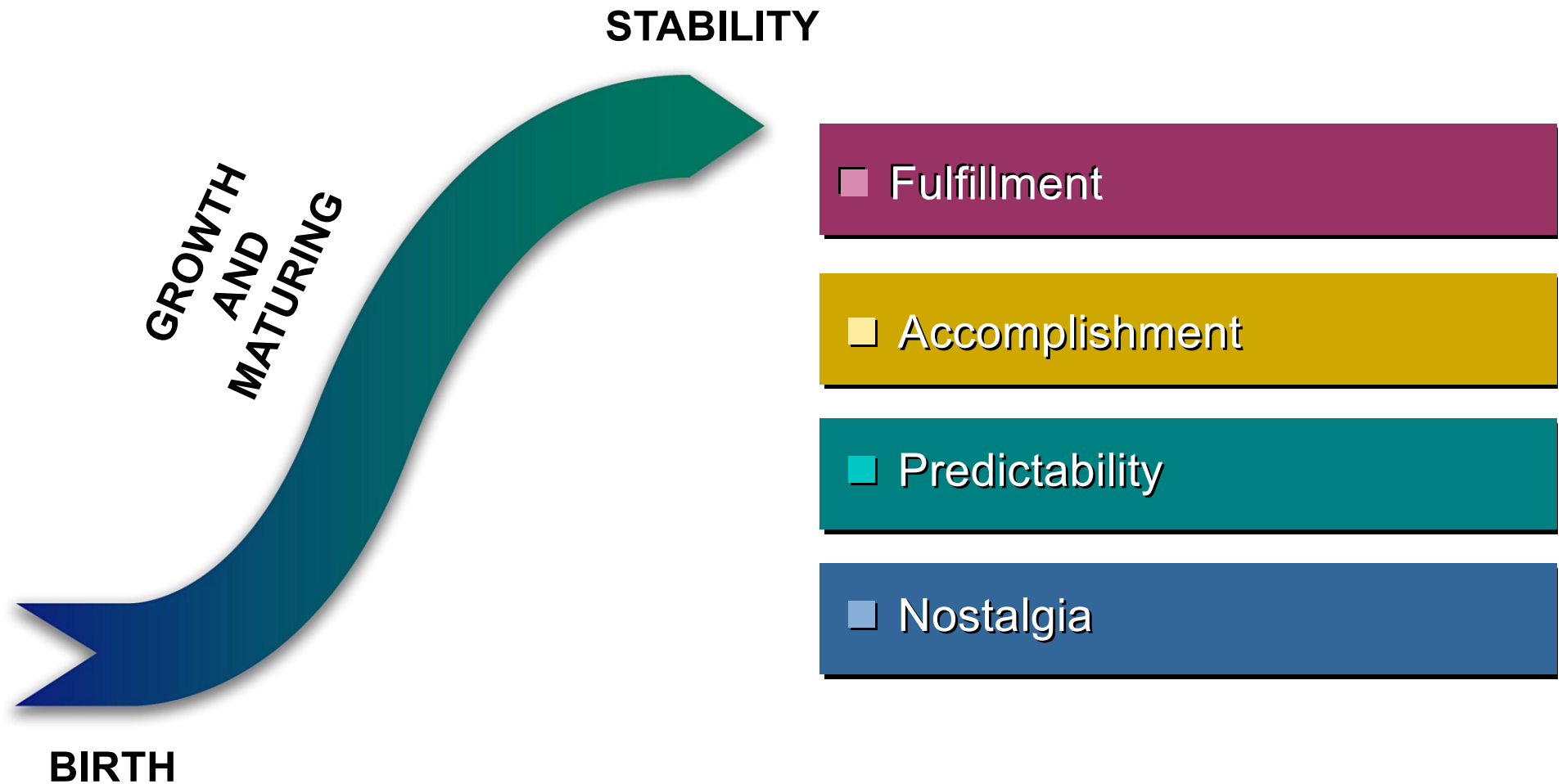
■ Unexpected

■ Progress

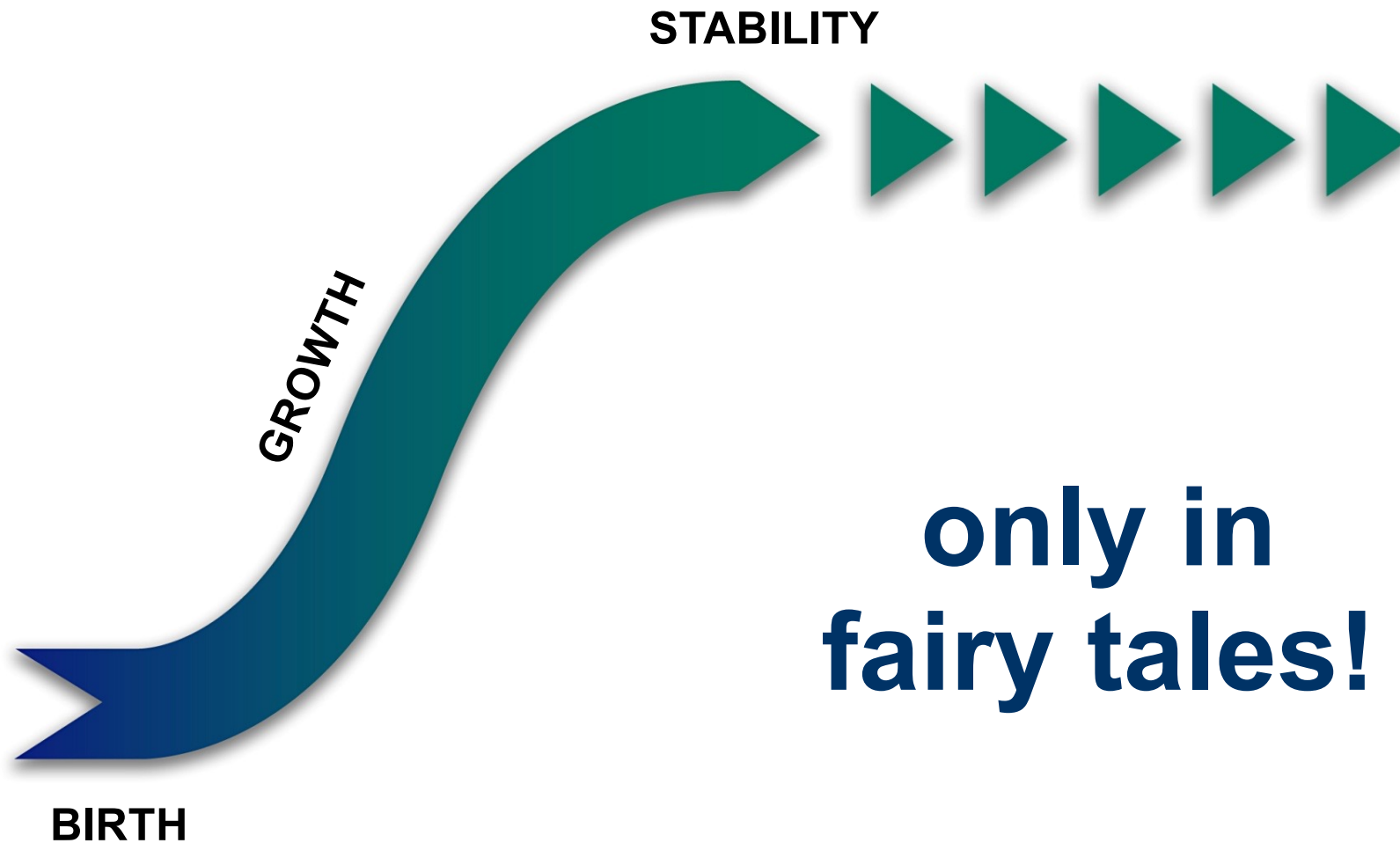
The Growth period is a time of:



Growth is followed by Stability

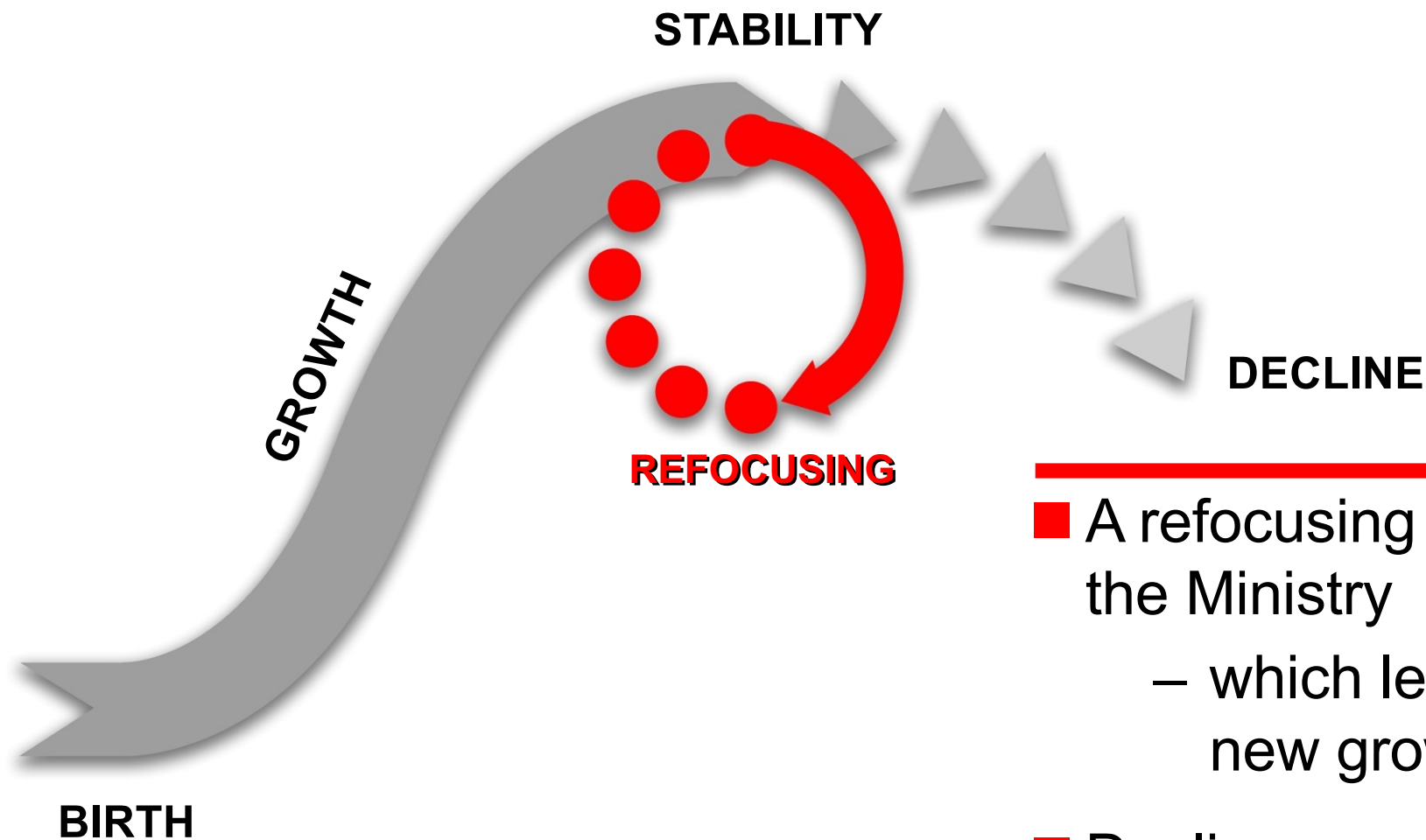


... and they lived happily ever after?



**only in
fairy tales!**

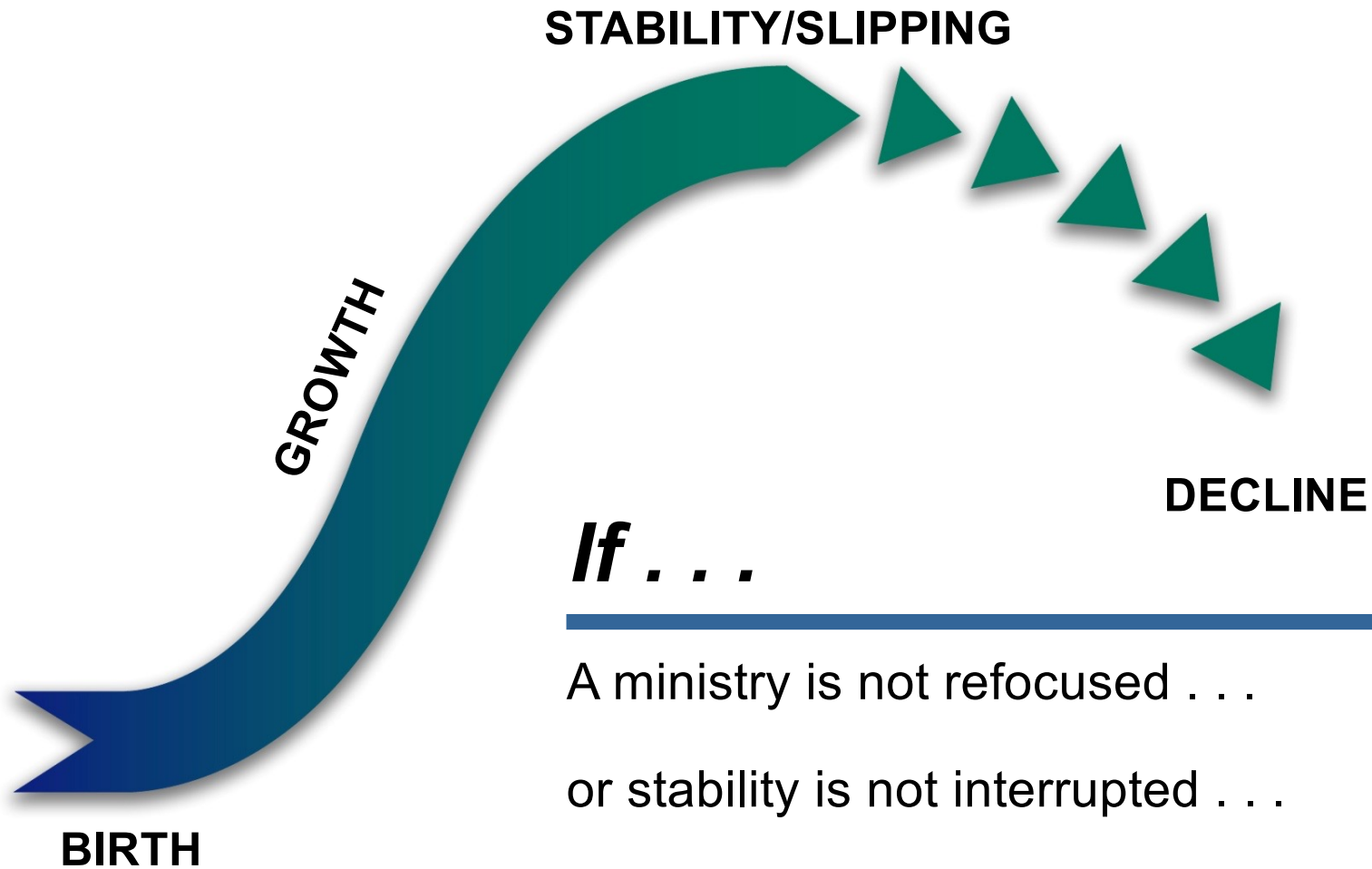
One of two things follows Stability



-
- A refocusing of the Ministry
 - which leads to a new growth cycle
 - Decline

Ministry can be refocused by addressing questions like:

- What was the original vision of the ministry?
- What has been accomplished?
- What is new that was not anticipated?
- Where do we want to see this ministry in three to five years?




If . . .

A ministry is not refocused . . .

or stability is not interrupted . . .

DECLINE WILL FOLLOW.

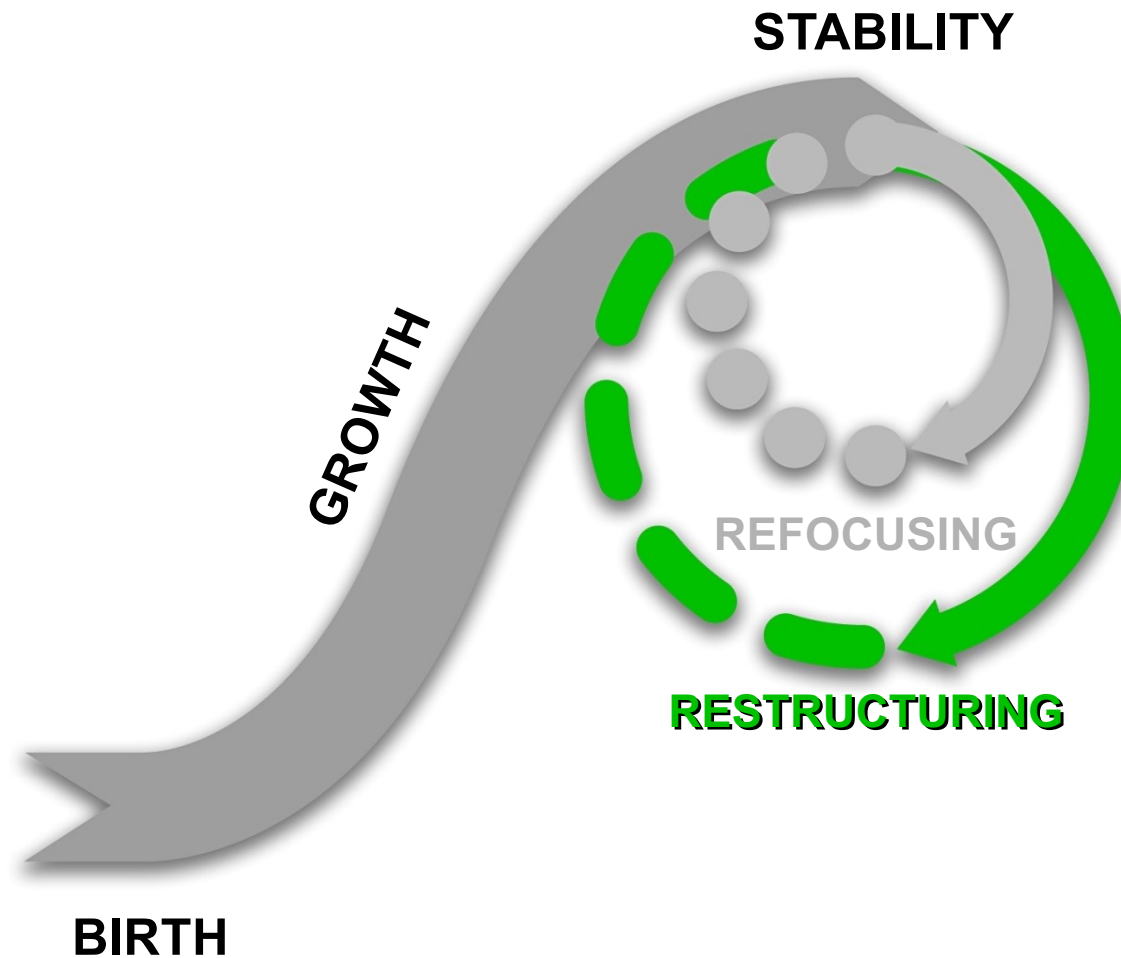


once a ministry is in decline
there is still the possibility
of new life...

...but the cost of new
life is greater.



Reversing decline requires Restructuring



■ Not just new information

■ but also new and different vision and direction

Restructuring

- New information alone will not reverse decline
- A new and different vision and direction can reverse decline
- New vision will be experienced by the congregation as significant change, and by some as loss



Intervening when a church is
in decline is difficult

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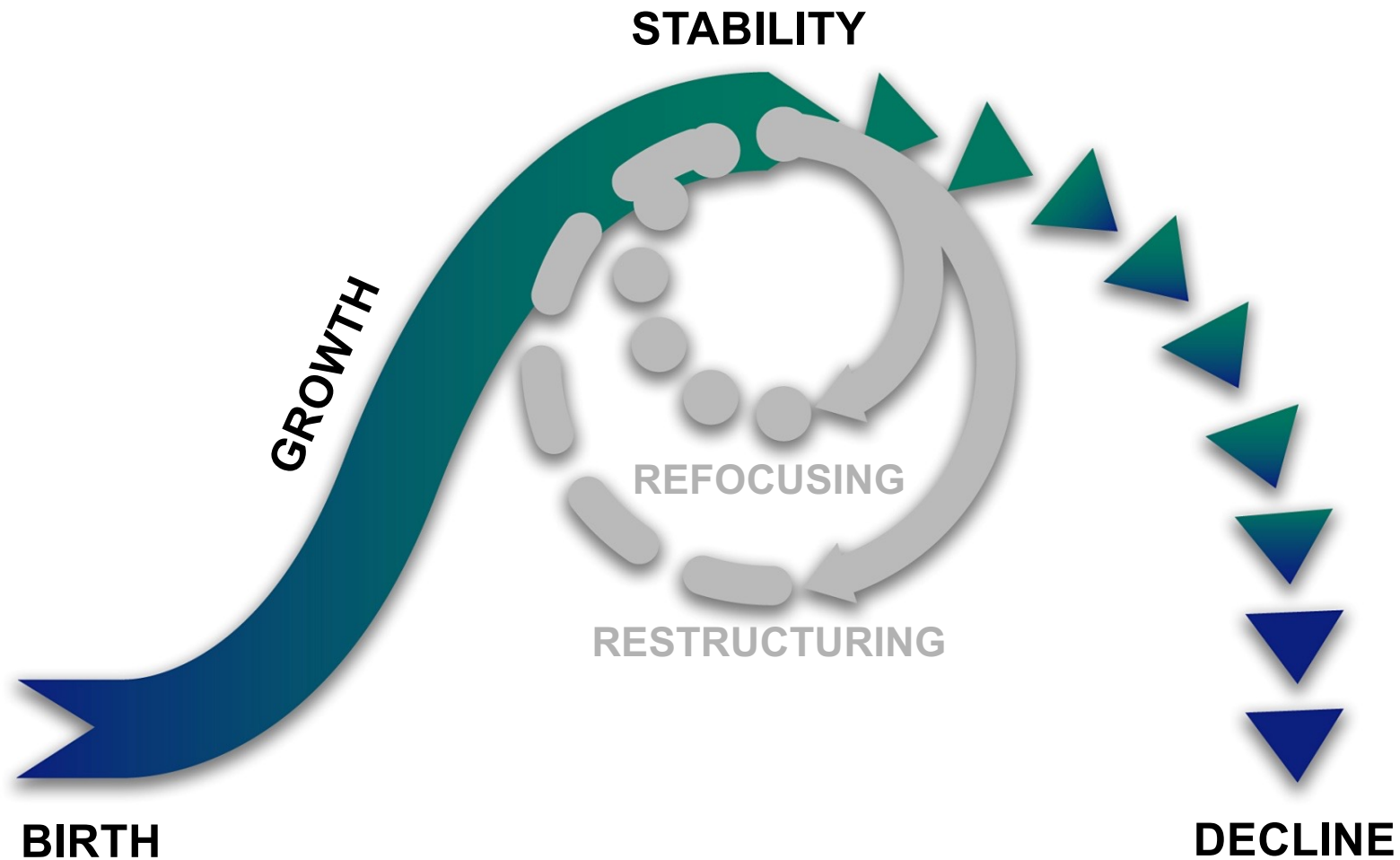
It requires skillful and well-
differentiated leadership



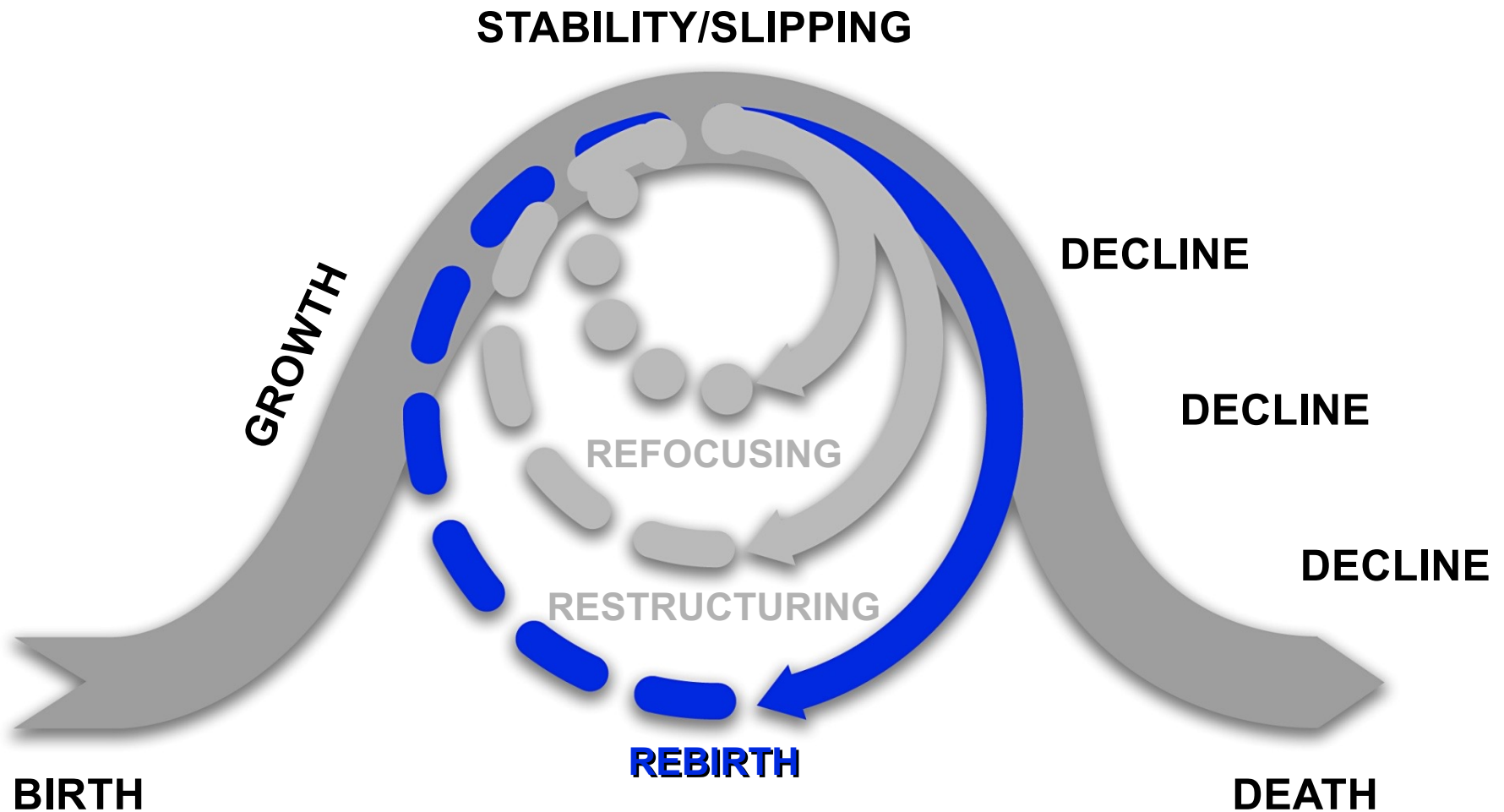
Well-differentiated Leaders

- Don't require affirmation from the congregation
- Don't change course in response to the discomfort that is provoked by change

Without Refocusing or Restructuring Decline will only lead to more serious Decline




Reversing serious Decline requires Rebirth




Rebirth of a
seriously **DECLINING**
ministry requires
radical change.


Rebirth will involve a new vision or
ministry

It doesn't involve doing the old
things in a different way but doing
a new thing, and perhaps in a
different place and with different
people




Without Rebirth
Decline will lead to
Death





As Decline increases,
greater interruption and
letting go is required.



Characteristics of Decline

Anxiety

Fear

Denial

Paranoia

Conflict

It is natural for a congregation in Decline to deny what is happening or underestimate the extent of the Decline and so fail to respond with sufficient interruption

Declining congregations —

- Ignore the congregational cold
- Treat congregational pneumonia with aspirin
- Embalm what is dead



There is no gain in
underestimating decline

—

There is no penalty for
overestimating decline



Resurrection does not follow denial —
Resurrection (new life) follows death (truth telling)

The questions are:

- What needs to die?
- What needs to be relinquished?

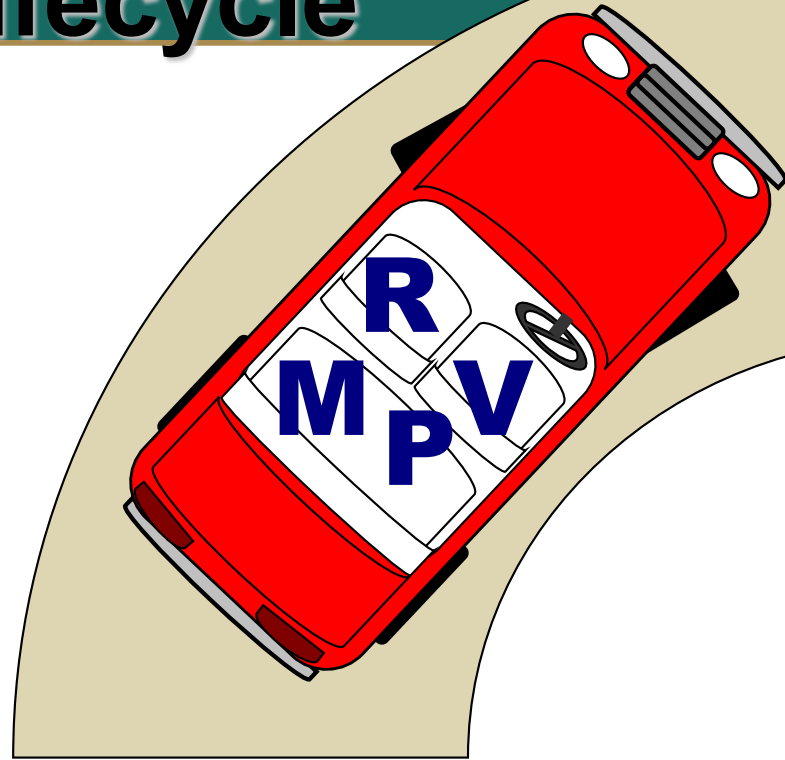


Life Cycle Lessons

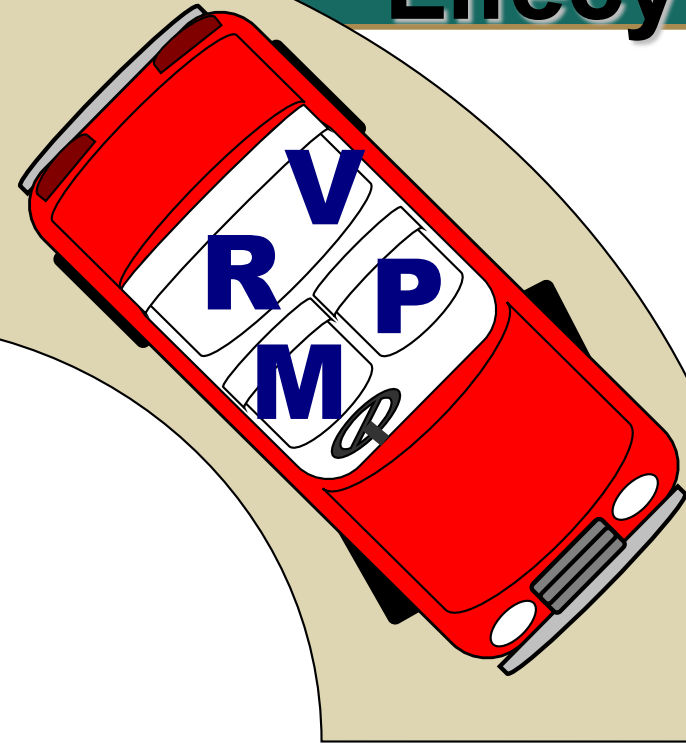
BIRTH

DEATH

Upward Lifecycle



Downward Lifecycle



When Vision is driving,
Relationships ride alongside;
Management and Program
are always catching up.

When Management is driving,
Program rides alongside;
Vision and Relationships
are always left behind

Life Cycle Lessons

When ***Growing***:

- ***Encourage*** the Growth

- ***Maximize*** the Growth

- ***Resource*** the Growth

Life Cycle Learnings

When ***Stable***:

- Refocus/Restructure the Ministry

- Identify the “New Information”

- Use Demographic Data — Both About the Congregation Itself and the Congregational Context

Life Cycle Lessons

When *Declining*:

Intervene —

■ Early

■ Accurately

Life Cycle Lessons

When ***Dead***:

Bury

■ Remember

■ Entrust

■ Let Go

The Congregational Life Cycle

