

GAINING THE MUSCLE TO LEAD

A pastoral playbook for leading people
who are further behind than they look.

ALTERNATIVE PATHS TO MISSING REPETITIONS



THE CAUSE: Trauma, dysfunction, and adverse experiences.

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The Sentence That Will Change How You Pastor

**Development
is not global.
It is domain
by domain.**

He is not an 18-year-old in a 52-year-old body.
He is a 52-year-old man who has 18-year-old skills
in the specific areas where a substance did his
living for him. He is not a child. He is uneven.

Domain Equalizer

Vocational
Competence



50+

Vocational
Competence

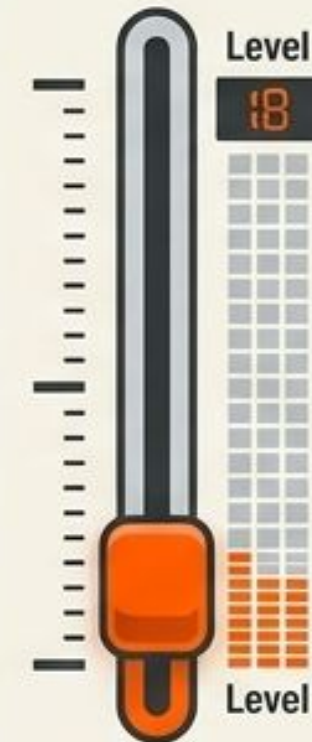
Street
Wisdom



50+

Street
Wisdom

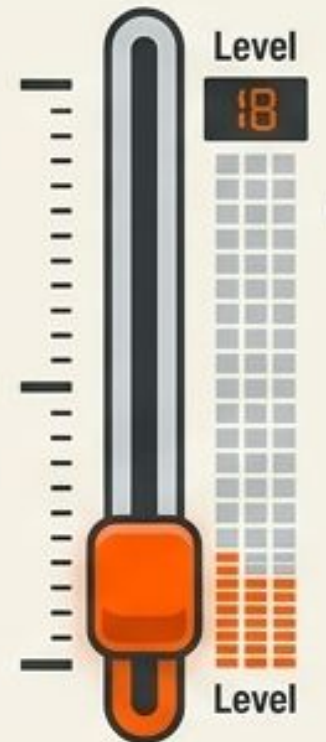
Conflict
Resolution



18

Conflict
Resolution

Impulse
Control



18

Impulse
Control

THE FOUR MECHANISMS OF MISSING CAPACITY



1. THE MISSING REPETITIONS

When the answer to every uncomfortable internal state is to escape, you log zero reps at tolerating disappointment, boredom, or conflict.



2. OUTSOURCED REGULATION

Addiction is an external emotional-regulation system. When removed, the internal system is not weak—it is practically non-existent.



3. DISRUPTED BIOLOGY

Heavy substance use disrupts the prefrontal regions (impulse control, planning) right as they are forming in the mid-twenties.

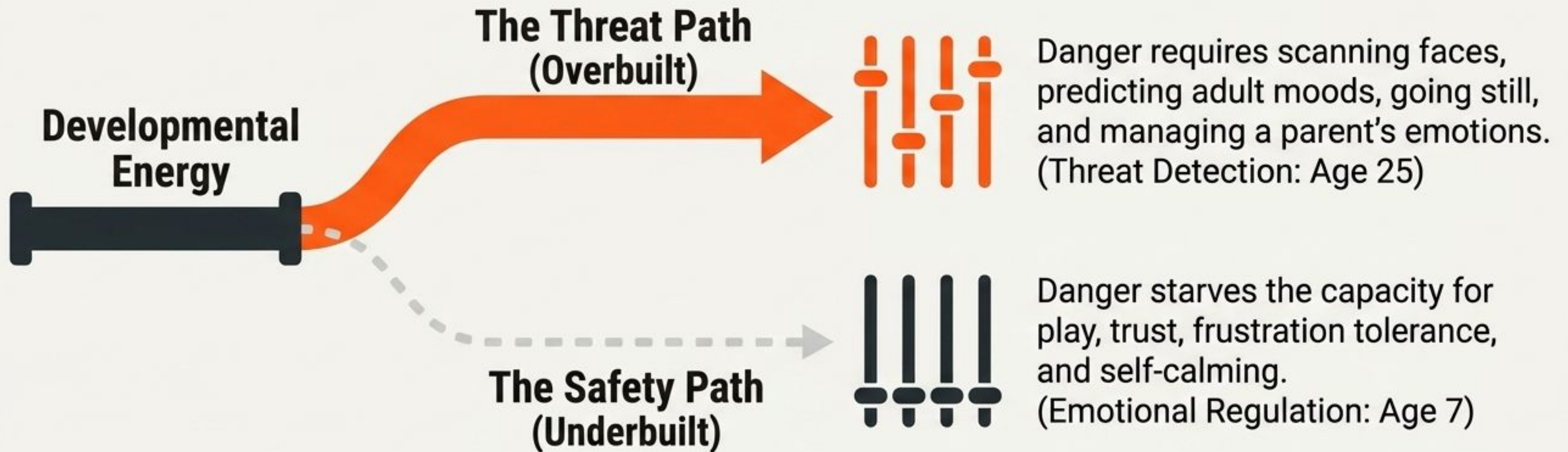


4. UNFINISHED GRIEF

What looks like immaturity is often the heavy, unprocessed grief of burying 34 lost years while trying to learn how to be an adult.

Trauma Reallocates Development

Chronic threat does exactly the same thing by a different road.



**Takeaway: Regression under stress is normal.
The word you need is not “defiant” or “behind.” It is “uneven.”**

Untangling The Pastoral Confusion

When we collapse these three categories, we falsely conclude a struggling person isn't truly saved—or we falsely conclude that because they are saved, they are ready to lead.

The Three Collapsed Categories



Salvation

Nature: Settled, instant, complete.

Reality: Not a matter of degree.



Sanctification

Nature: God's continuous work in a person.

Reality: Real from day one, but lifelong.



Developmental Capacity

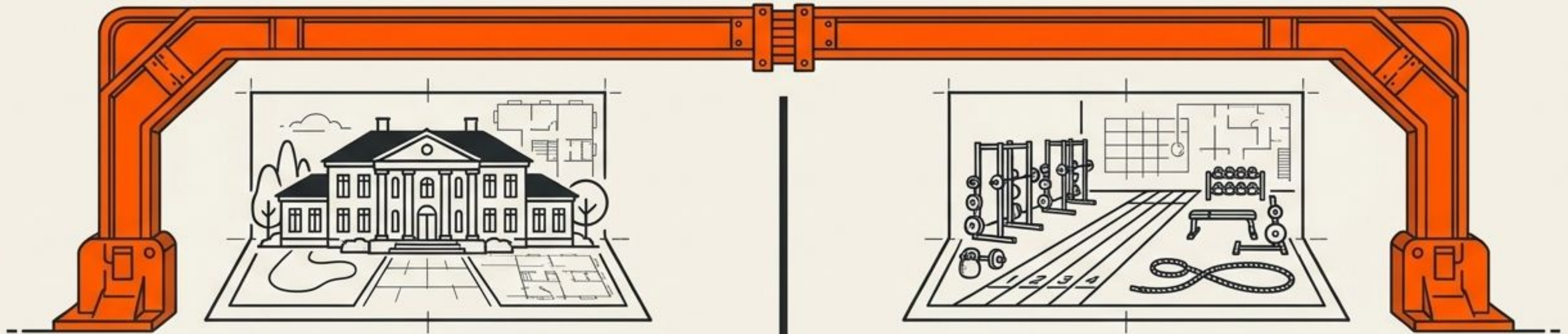
Nature: Built exclusively by practice.

Reality: Damaged by what was missing; unaffected by how sincere someone is.

A man can be genuinely saved, genuinely filled, genuinely sincere—and genuinely unable to handle a budget or a conflict.

The Paradox of the Heir (Galatians 4:1-7)

The heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave—though he owns the whole estate. He is under guardians and trustees until the time set by the father.



Position: Owns Everything.

Fully adopted, entirely brand new
(2 Cor 5:17).

Condition: Functionally Unable.

Lacks the developmental muscle to access
the estate without a season of guardianship.

**Core Synthesis: He is not a half-Christian. He is an heir in the guardianship season.
Both are true on the exact same day: entirely new, and not yet grown.**

God's Blueprint for the Fragile



Jesus Himself Developed

(Luke 2:52) "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature..." The sinless one still had to grow, and grew unevenly enough across four domains that Luke listed them separately. Learning is not a sin.



God Sets the Pace to the Weakest

(Isaiah 40:11 / 42:3) "A bruised reed he will not break." He handles the not-yet-grown by acting as a shield, leading at the pace of those with young.



Healing in Stages is not Failed Progress

(Mark 8) Jesus heals the blind man in two stages—first seeing "trees walking," then clear sight. Partial progress did not offend the Healer.

Playbook Rule 1: Build Reps, Don't Expose

1 Tim 3:6 - "Not a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall..." A powerful testimony is not a leadership qualification.

 The Right-Sized Assignment	 The Exposing Assignment
Action: Setting up chairs every week for a year. Muscle Built: Faithfulness, belonging, reps at showing up when you don't feel like it. Failure here is survivable.	Action: Leading a small group at nine months sober. Muscle Required (But Missing): Conflict tolerance, boundary-holding, confidentiality under pressure. Failure here crushes the individual.

The Test Question: What developmental capacity does this require, and does he actually have it yet?

Playbook Rule 2: Parent the Behavior's Age

When you know what is coming, you stop taking it personally and start planning for it.

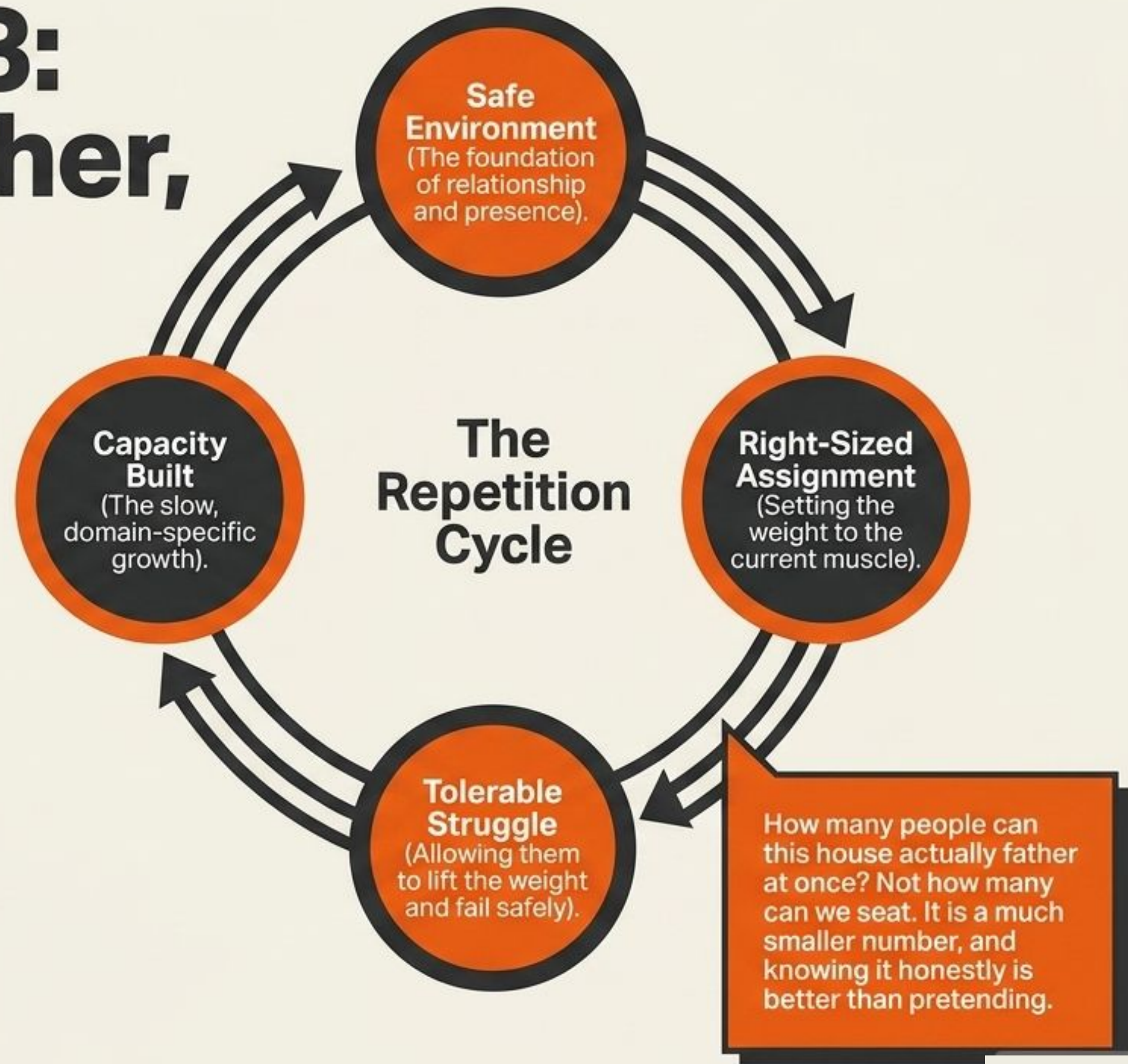
The Behavior vs. Age Diagnostic Table

The Behavior	The Root Cause	The Leadership Response
All-or-Nothing Thinking ("This church is perfect" to "This church is evil").	A regulation problem, not a loyalty problem.	Settle the nervous system first. Validate the overwhelm. Postpone the logical discussion.
Intense Attachment / Sudden Rupture.	Early relational trauma; a single disappointment triggers total withdrawal.	Validate the attachment need. Don't chase the rupture. Be the stable object.
Deafness to Correction.	Correction is heard as total rejection, because for most of their life, it was.	Address the behavior, not the person. Reframe as coaching, not critique. Affirm before correcting.

The Rule: When dysregulated, they are operating at age seven. No fourteen-year-old conversation will reach them. Settle the nervous system first; address the behavior later.

Playbook Rule 3: Mother and Father, Not Just Teach

Information does not build capacity. Gymnazo (Hebrews 5:14) means to train as an athlete trains.



Playbook Rule 4: Know Your Lane out Loud

You are a **pastor**, not a therapist. The distinction protects both of you. **They are complementary**; neither replaces the other.

Discipleship

Builds Spiritual Capacity.

Focuses on biblical truth, community belonging, and spiritual formation.

Therapy

Rebuilds Regulation Capacity.

Focuses on the nervous system, trauma processing, and clinical windows of tolerance.

Action Steps: Refer without spiritual hedging. ("I want you seeing a counselor AND I want to keep meeting with you"). Never frame therapy as a failure of faith from the platform.

Delayed is not denied.

34 years of missing repetitions are not undone in six.
These capacities are built, not issued at birth. Which means
they can still be built—at fourteen, at fifty-two, at seventy.

We are not running a program that graduates people. We are running a family that raises them. And nobody finishes raising a child in eighteen months.