# The Privileges and Perils of Growing Up as MKs

By Ruth E. Van Reken

PNG-KLS-SPLC Retreat

October 6, 2023
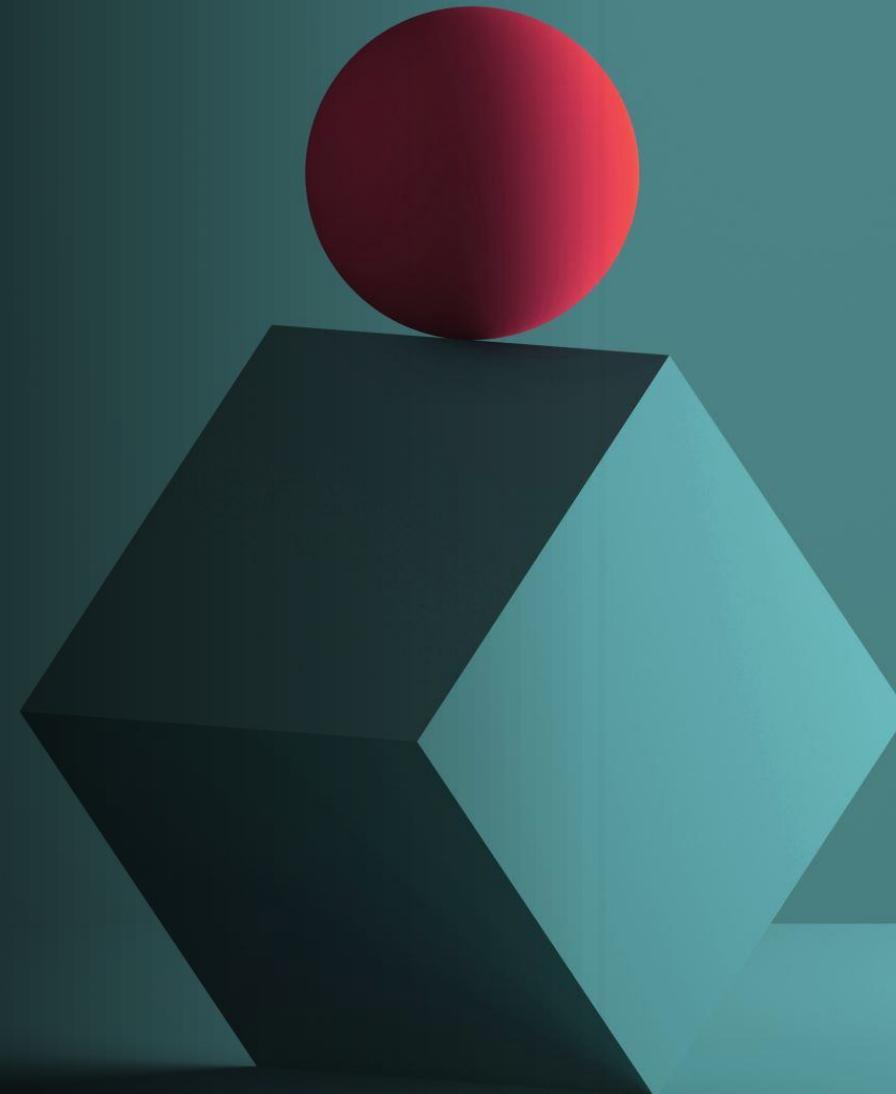
Suggested topics

- The effects of being an MK both positive and difficult

- Being left behind, home sickness

- Attachment issues, trauma/harm, abandonment issues, unresolved conflict

- How do our past experiences relate to our current lives, transitions from childhood into adulthood

Context of our story

Foreign Service Kids

Military Brats

Traditional Third Culture Kids

Corporate Brats

Missionary Kids
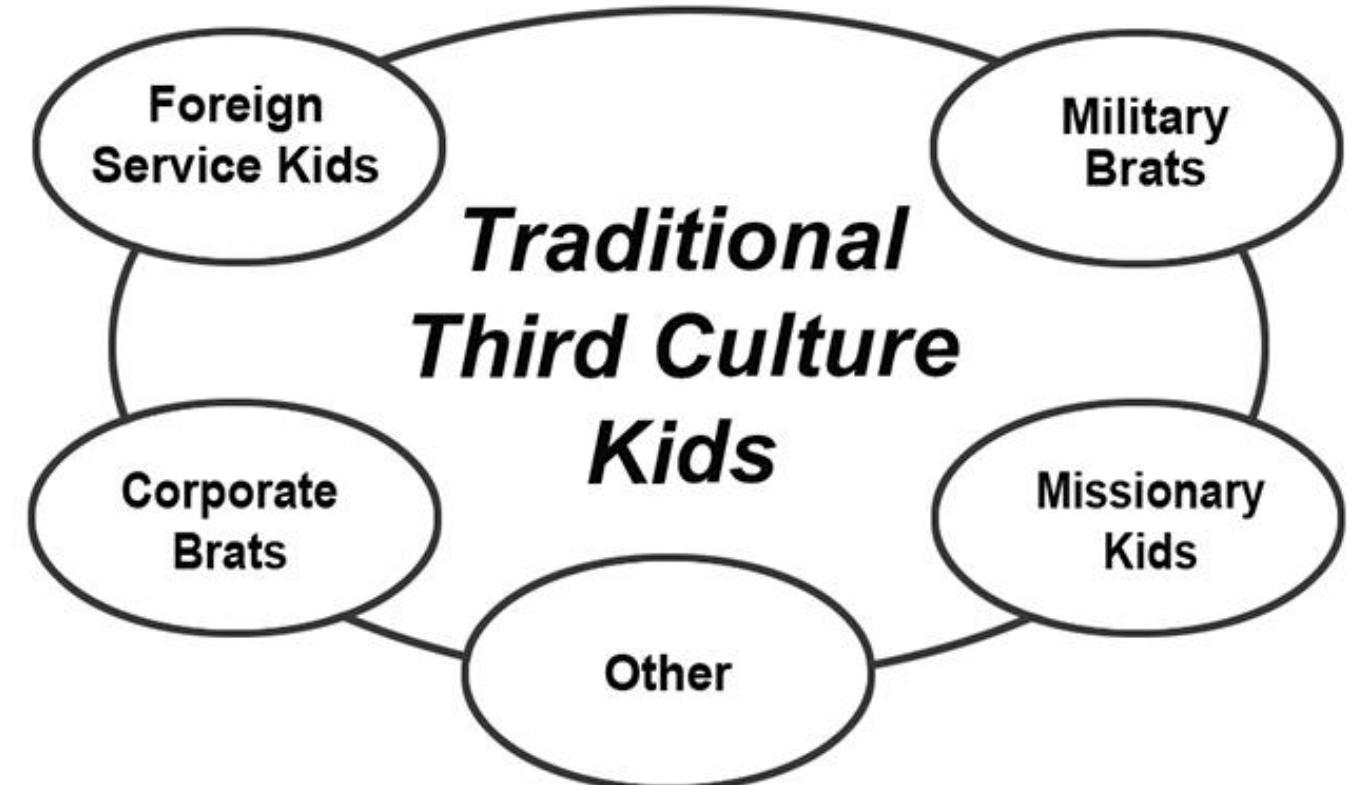
Other

Two commonalities of traditional TCKs

Cross-cultural childhood

High mobility—their's and/or the community around them

Common benefits shared with other TCKs

Meeting people from many countries, cultures, languages

Developing cross-cultural skills, including potentially multi-lingualism

Seeing the world firsthand

Potentially being a bridge between people/groups

Friends all over the world—saves lots of money for hotels!

Common challenges share with other TCKS

Delusion of choice

Too many relationships to keep up with

Premature detachment

Rootlessness and restlessness

Uneven maturity
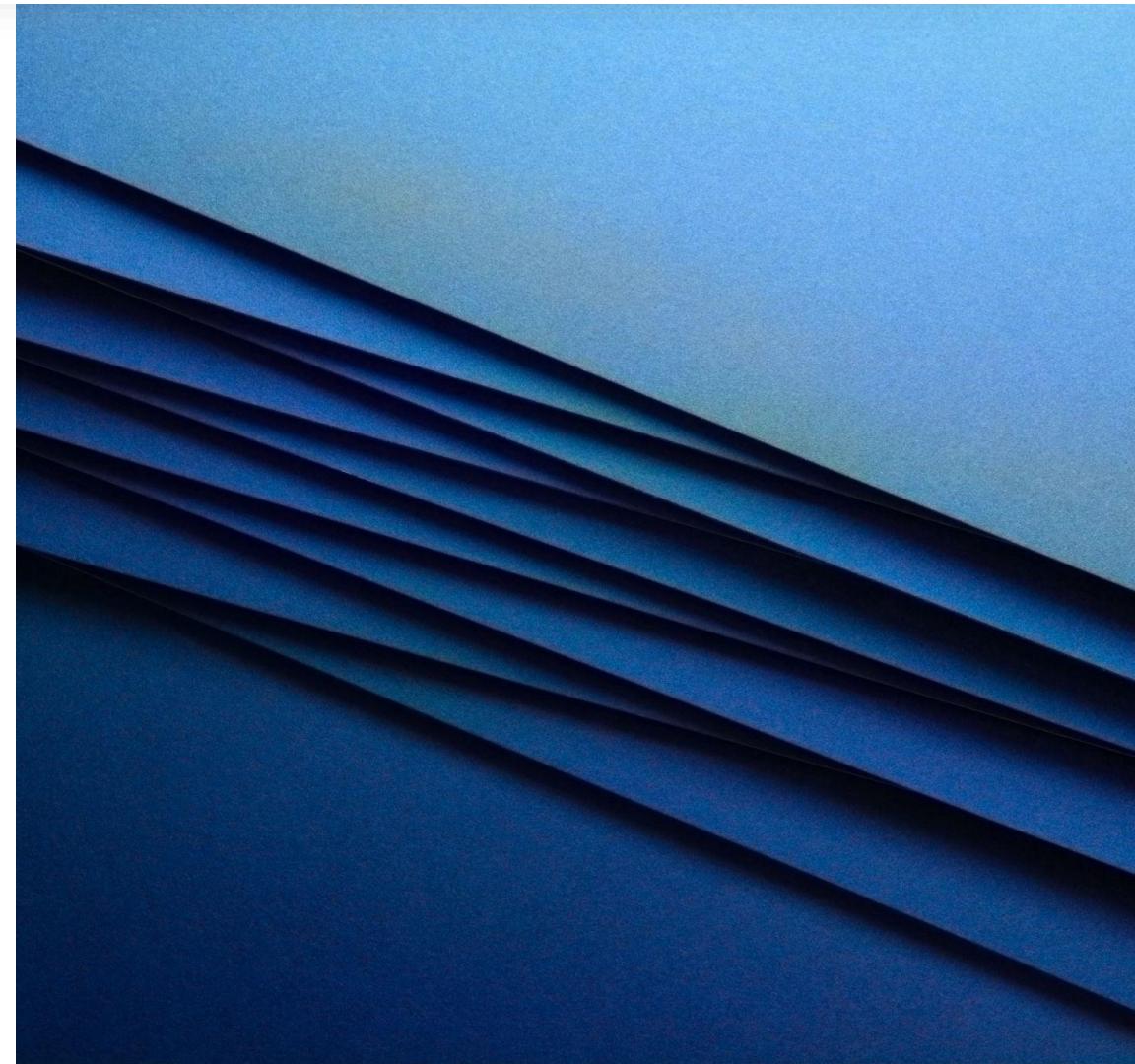
Main challenges

Questions of identity

- Who am I?
- Where do I belong?

Loss

- Attachment
- Unresolved Grief
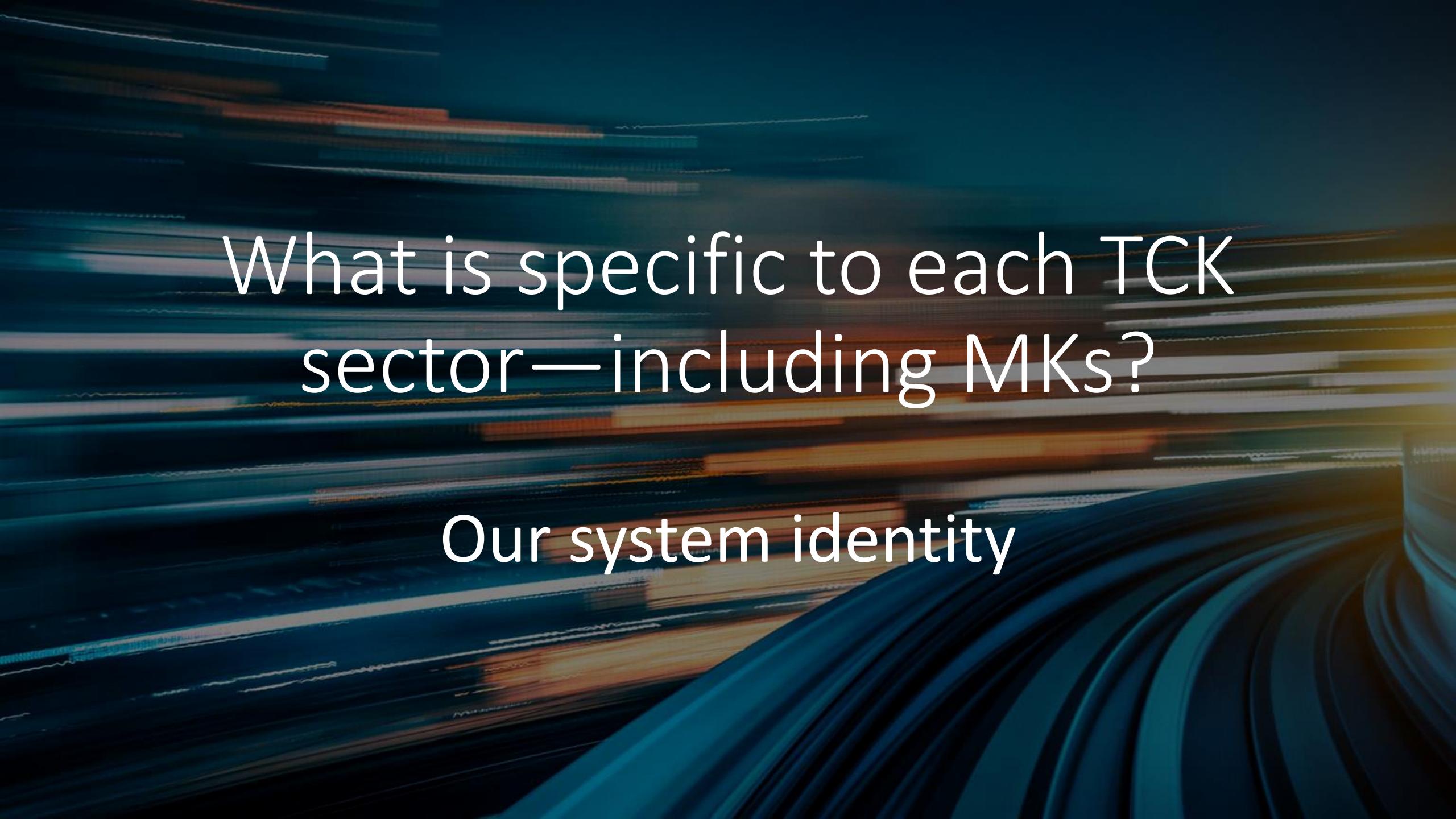
What is specific to each TCK sector—including MKs?

Our system identity

Ours is growing up in a 'God system'

- When the reason for its rules, code of conduct, values, are a result of wanting to please/serve/worship/ obey God. God is 'at the top.'

  - Examples?

How this topic

of understanding

'systems' began for me

Meeting Lois Bushong...

Lois Bushong's 'Lock Box'

Fearful

Clone

Powerless

Person

Defensive

Paranoid

Anger/Rejection

Keep Reaching out to them

Power

Closed

Mission System

Absolute Rules

Disrespect for the Individual

Risk

Conditional Love

Unknown

God

Our Way – Only Way

'Go Ye'

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How truth can set free

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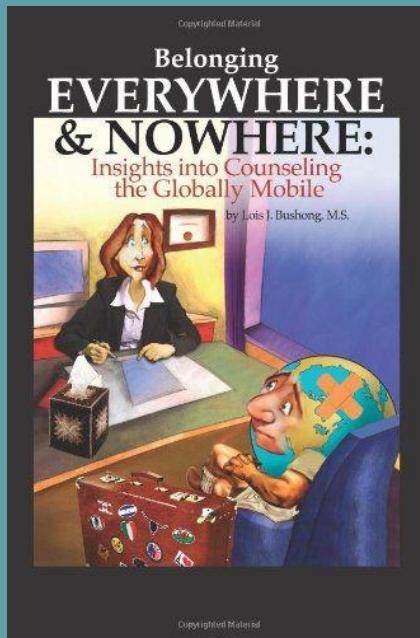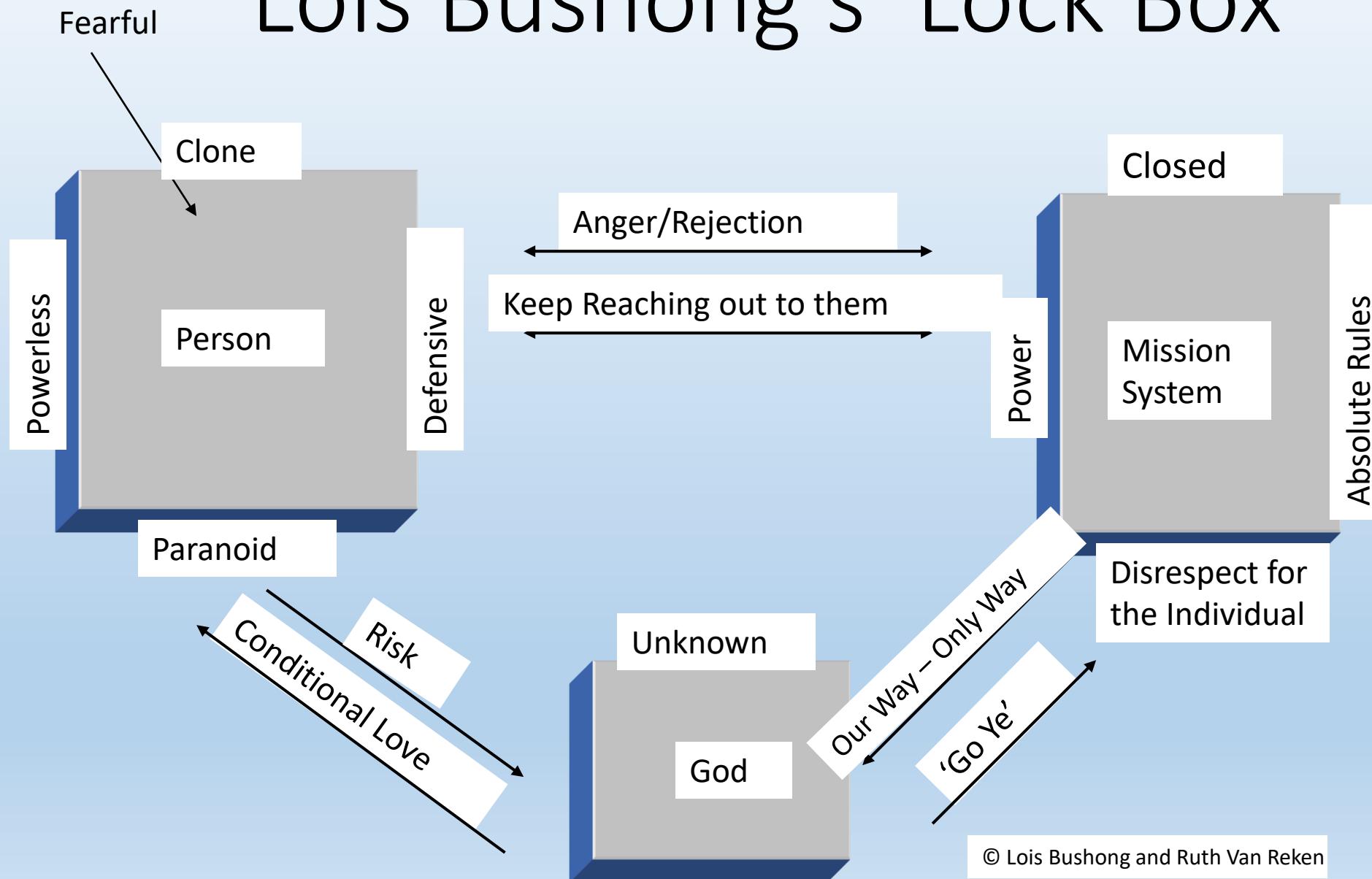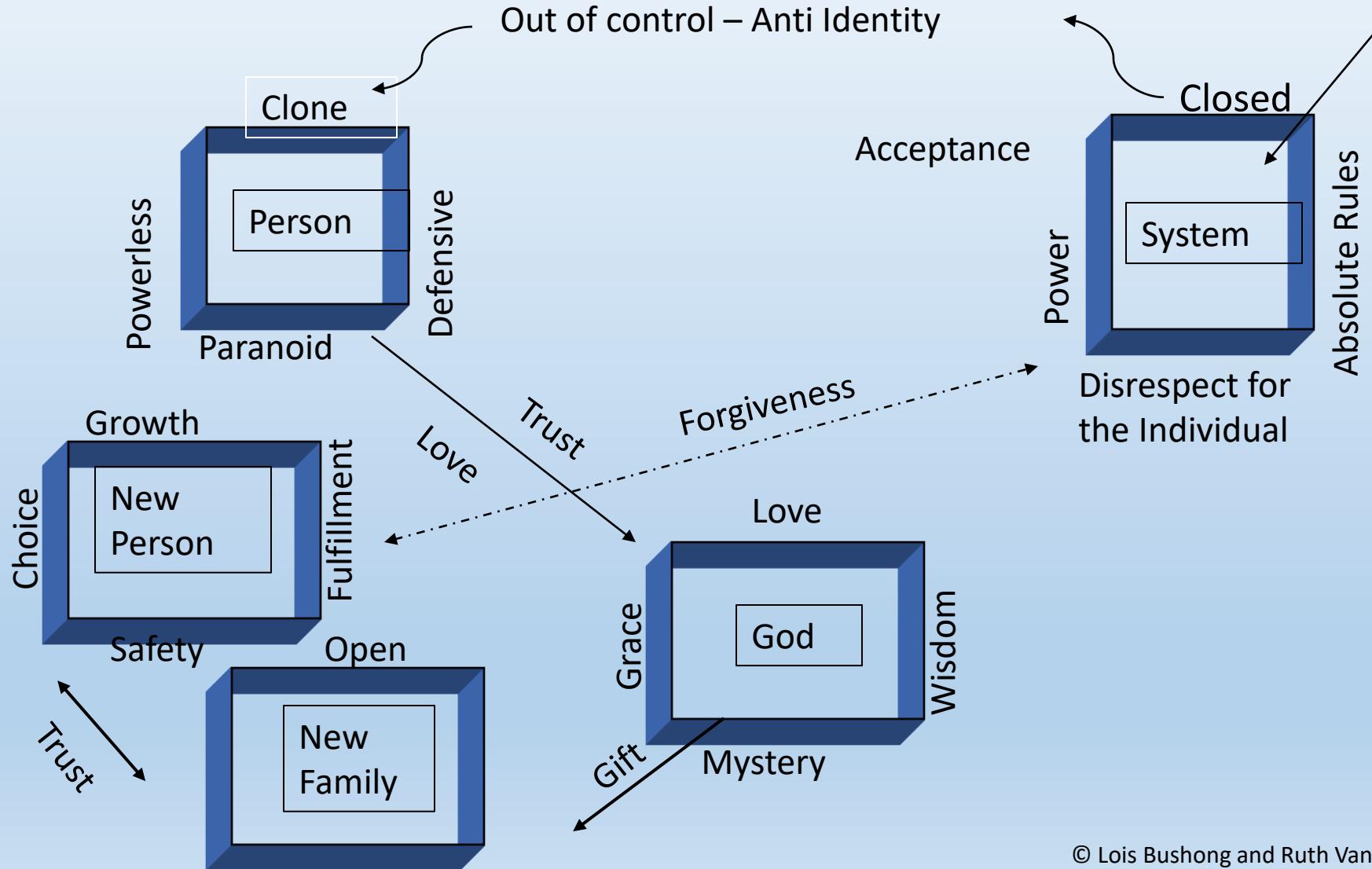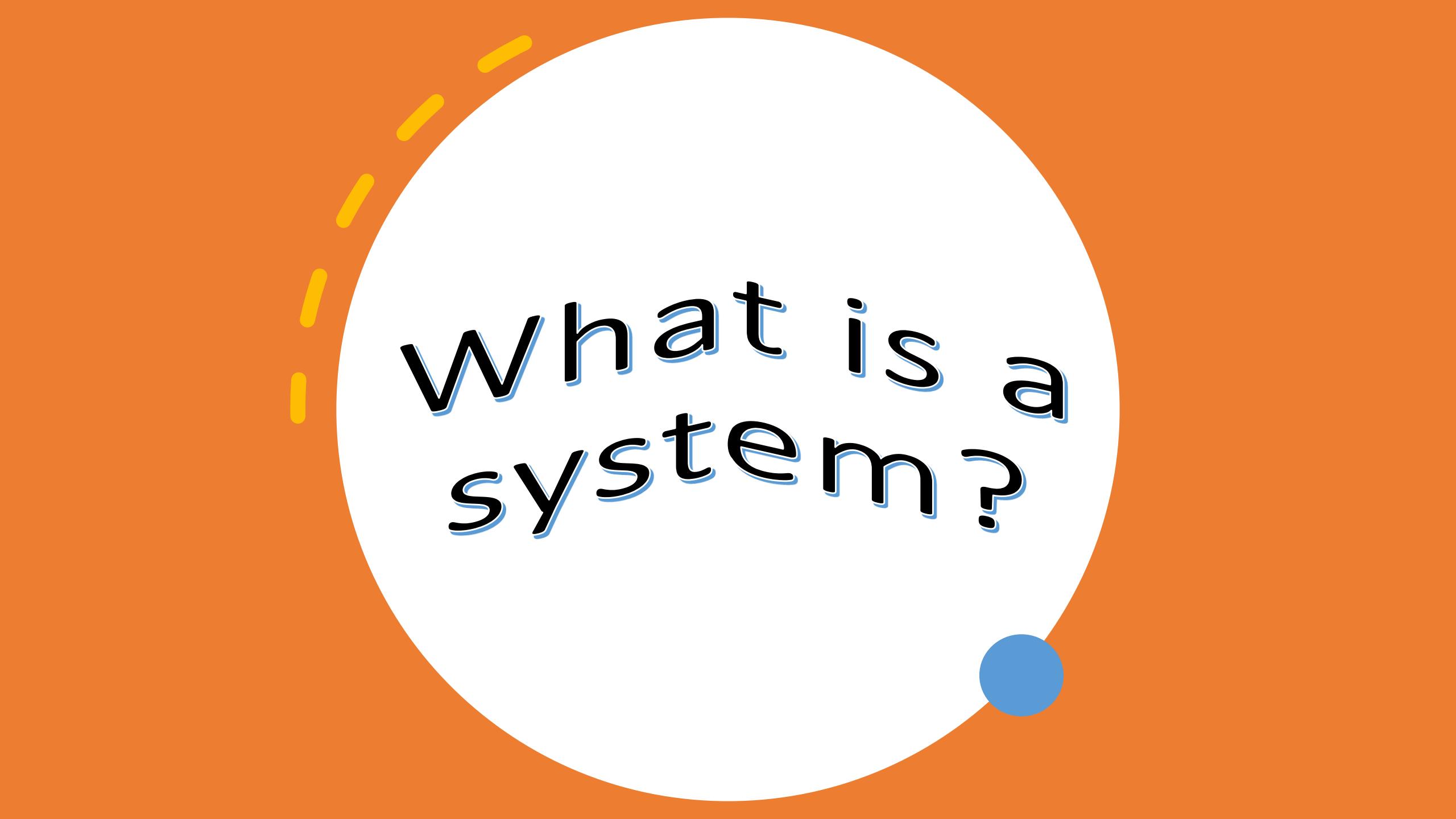
What is a
system?

What is a system?

- A system consists of 'interrelated and interactive elements' subsystems.

- Each subsystem has its own subunits.

- Both the subsystems and their subunits are under the rules and routines that make up the organized whole.

A system is more then the sum of its parts

• It's more than what each individual believes

• It's more than how each person would act if acting alone

• It consists of the unspoken as well as the spoken expectations and dynamics

COMPANY CULTURE

Community

Family Tree

What kind of systems are there?

Purpose of a system

Creates stability / longevity

Promotes growth and change

Gives a place of security and/or belonging

Creates predictability—both good and bad

Example of a mission organizational system
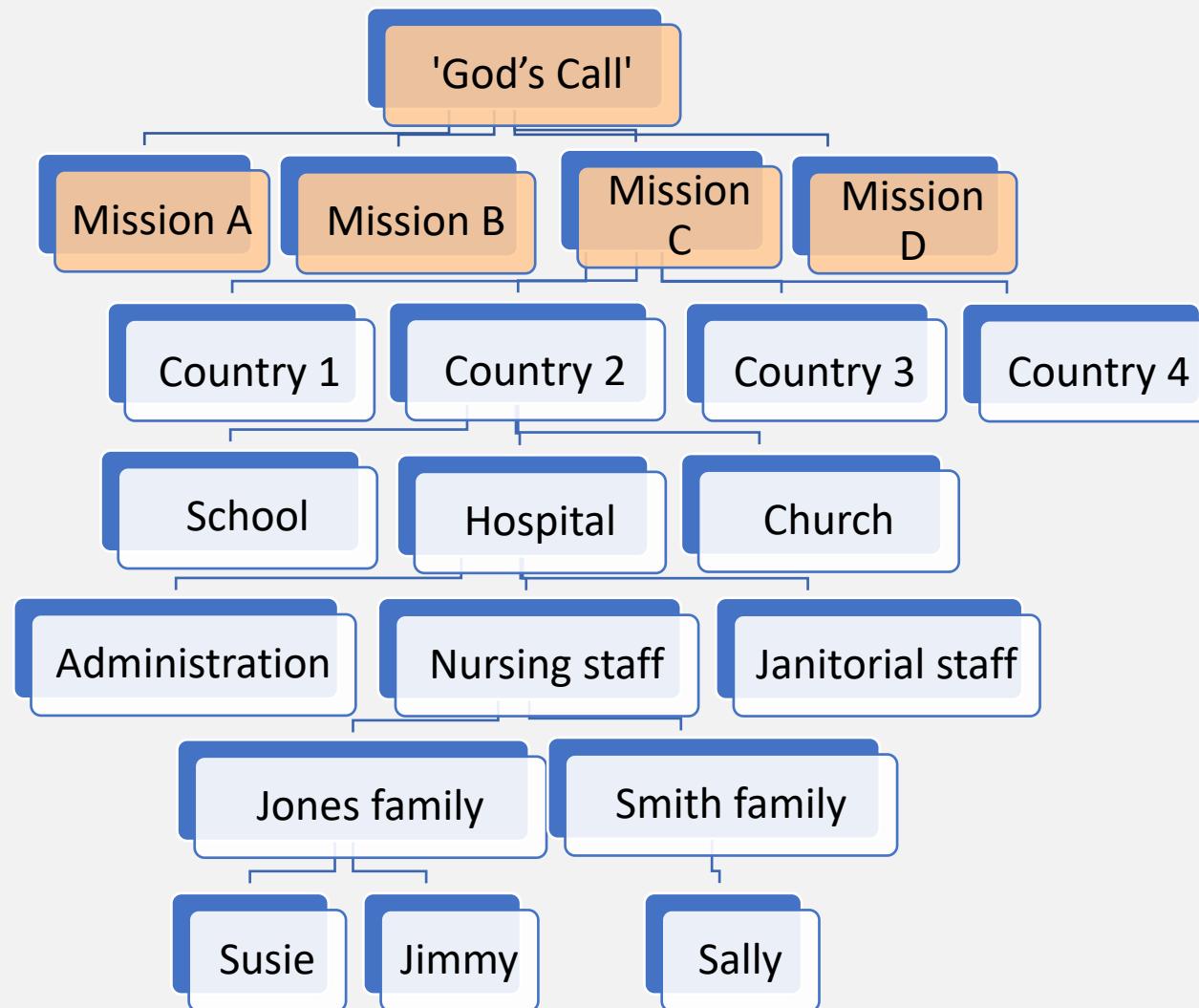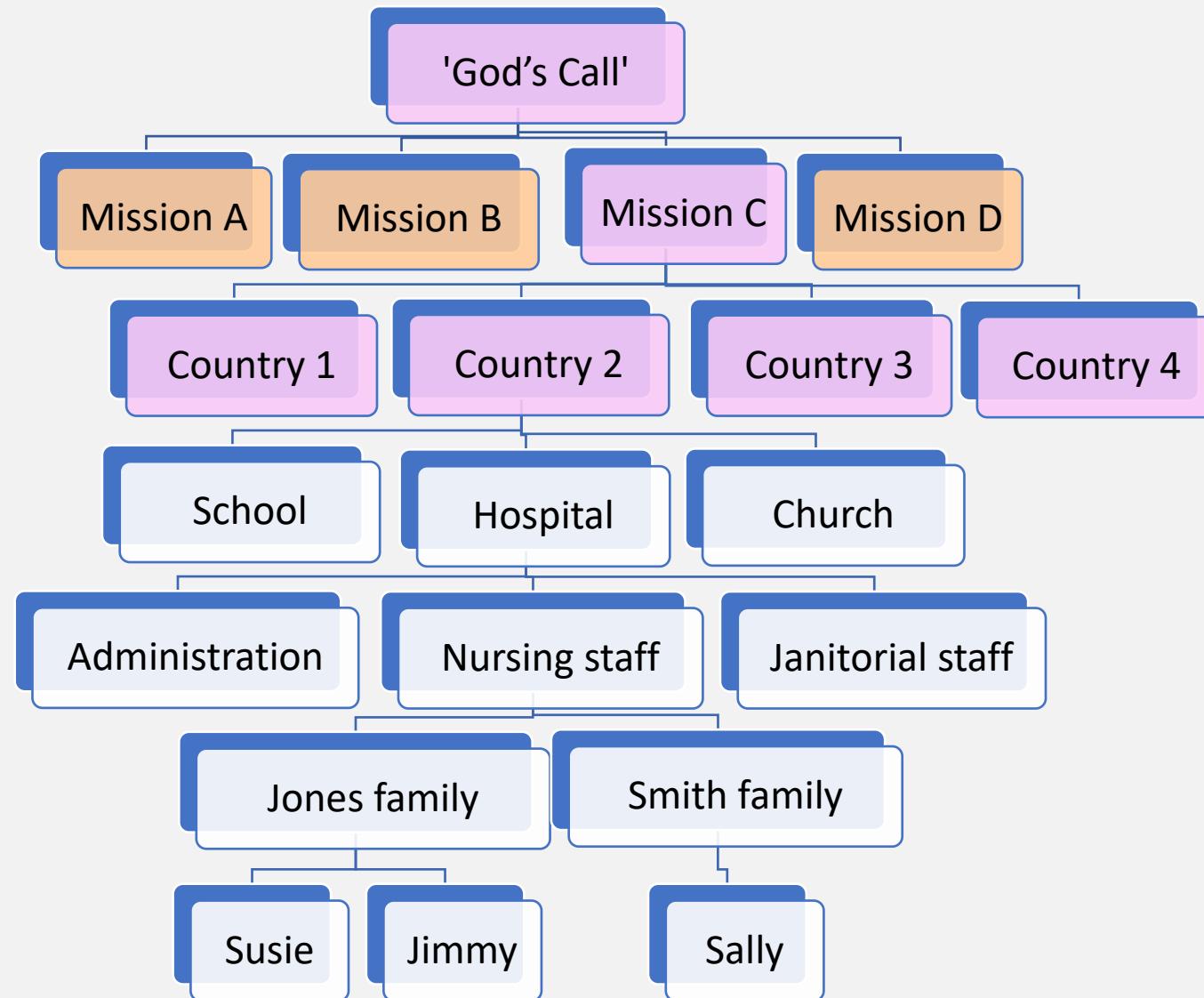
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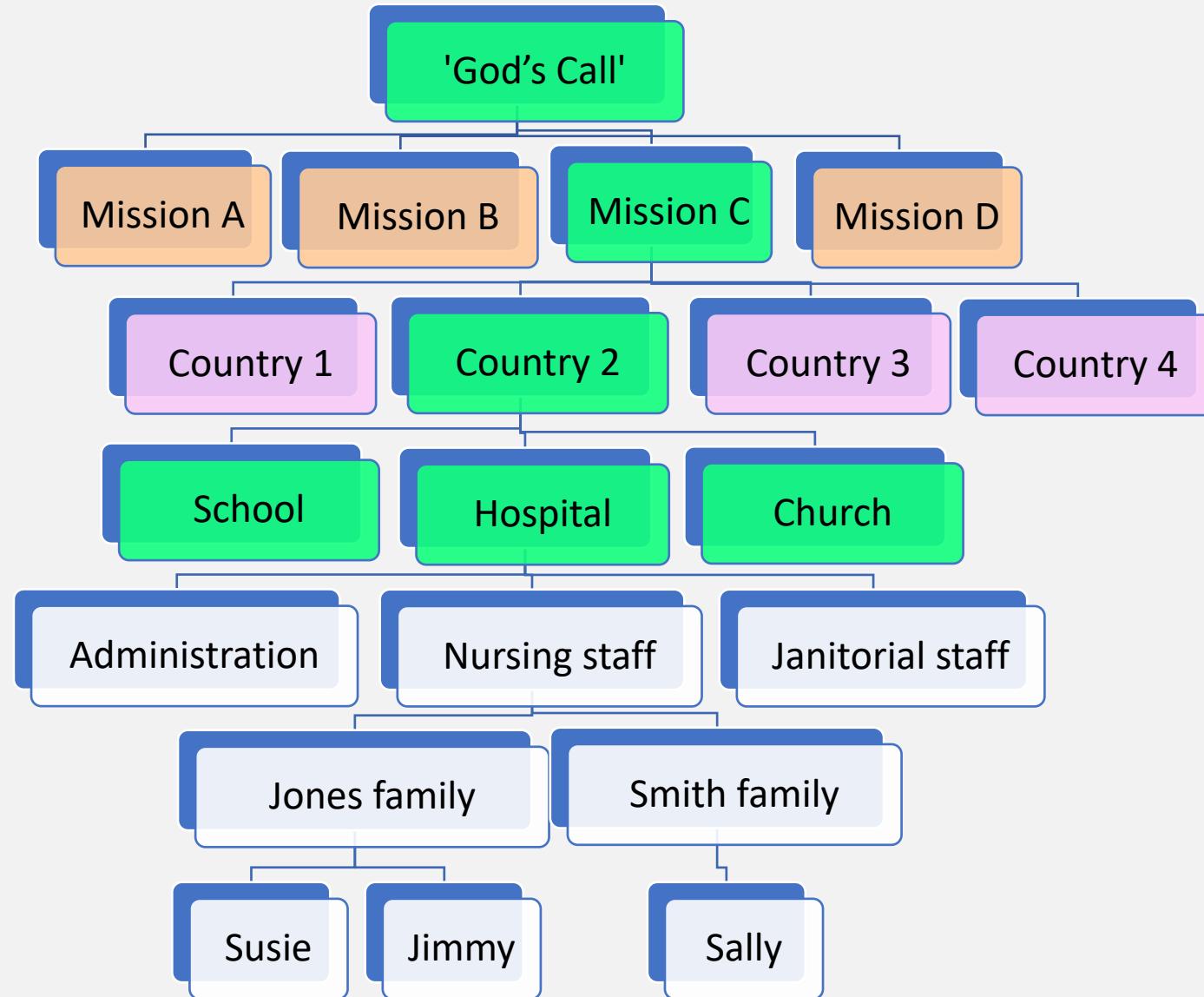
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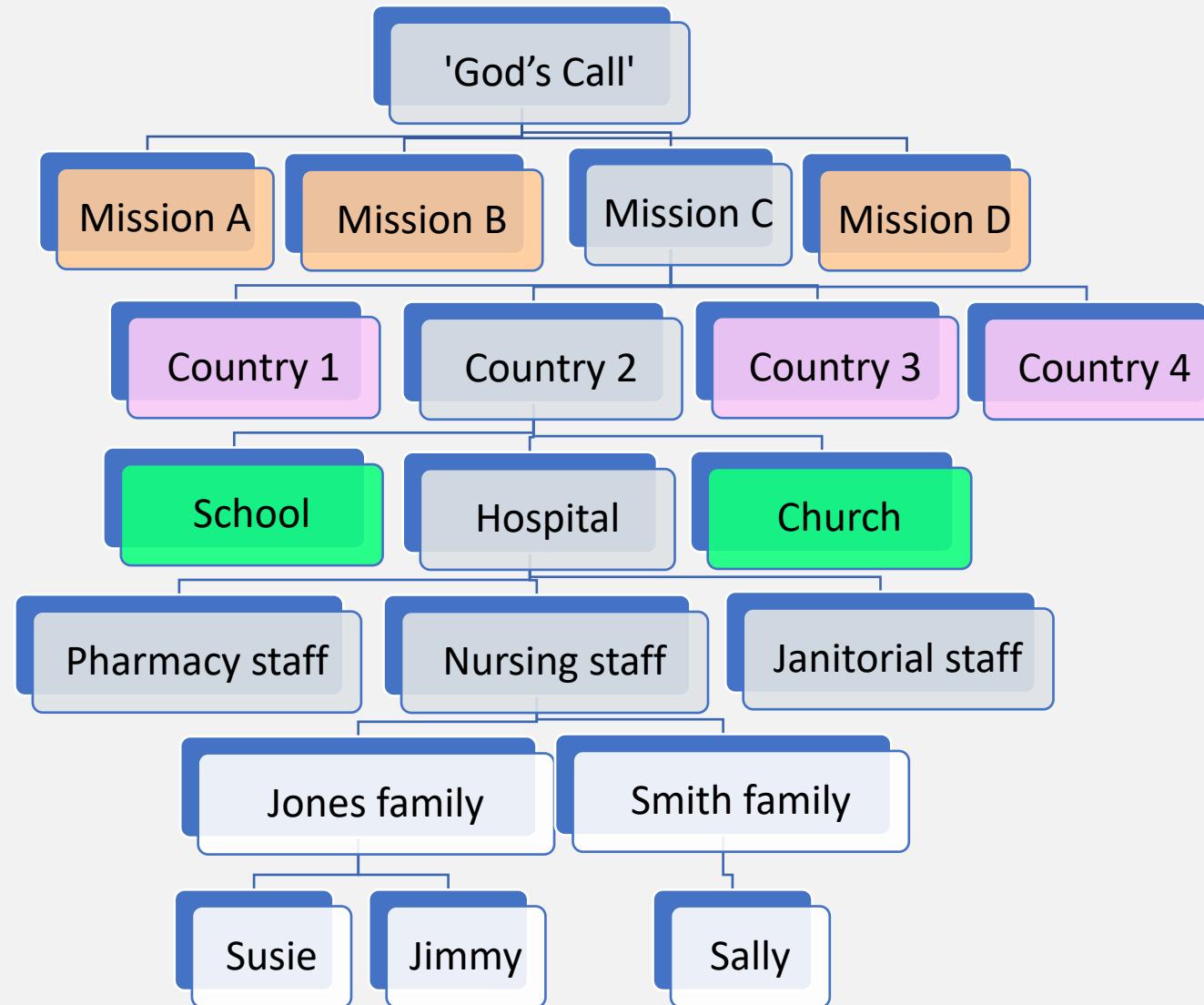
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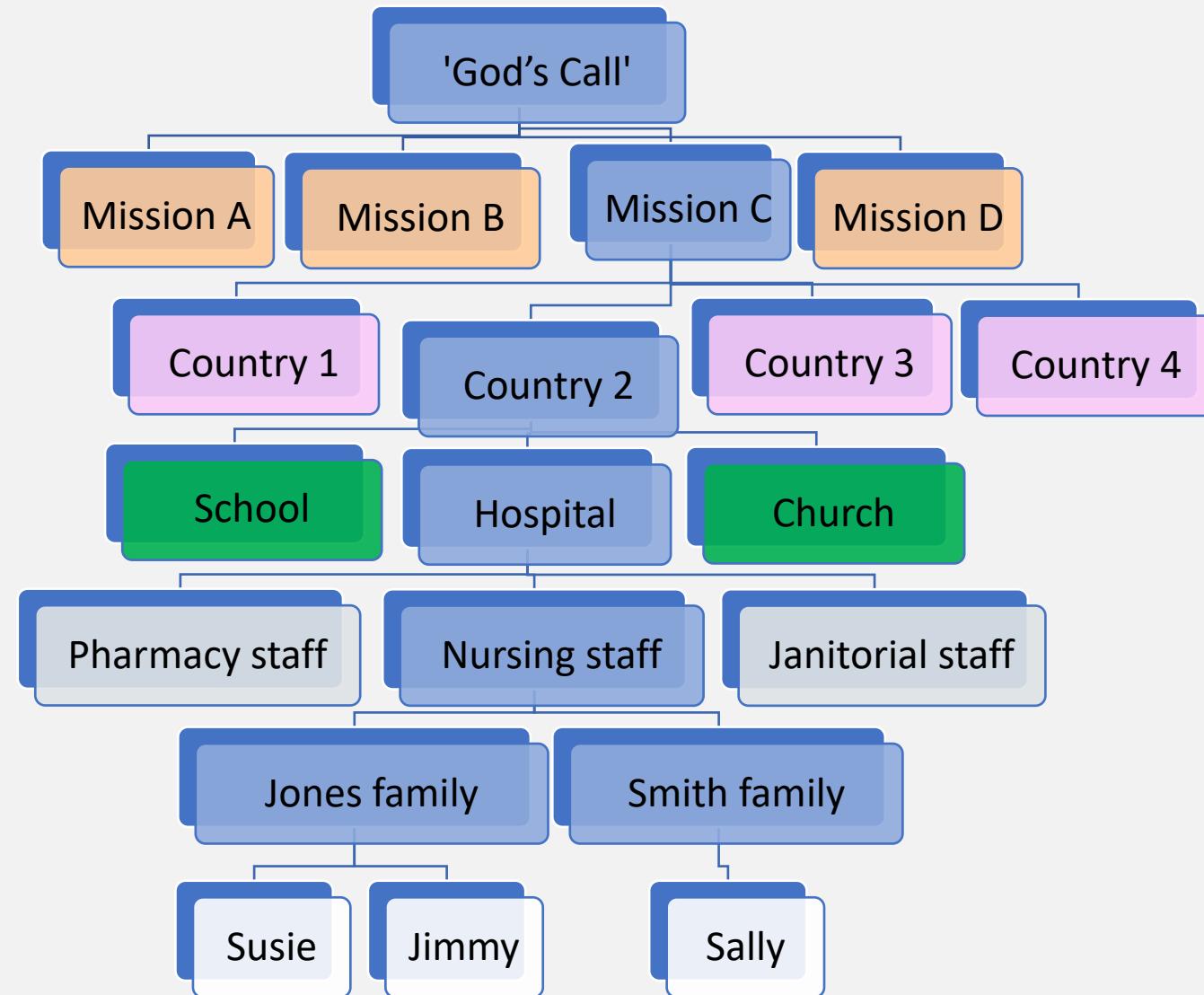
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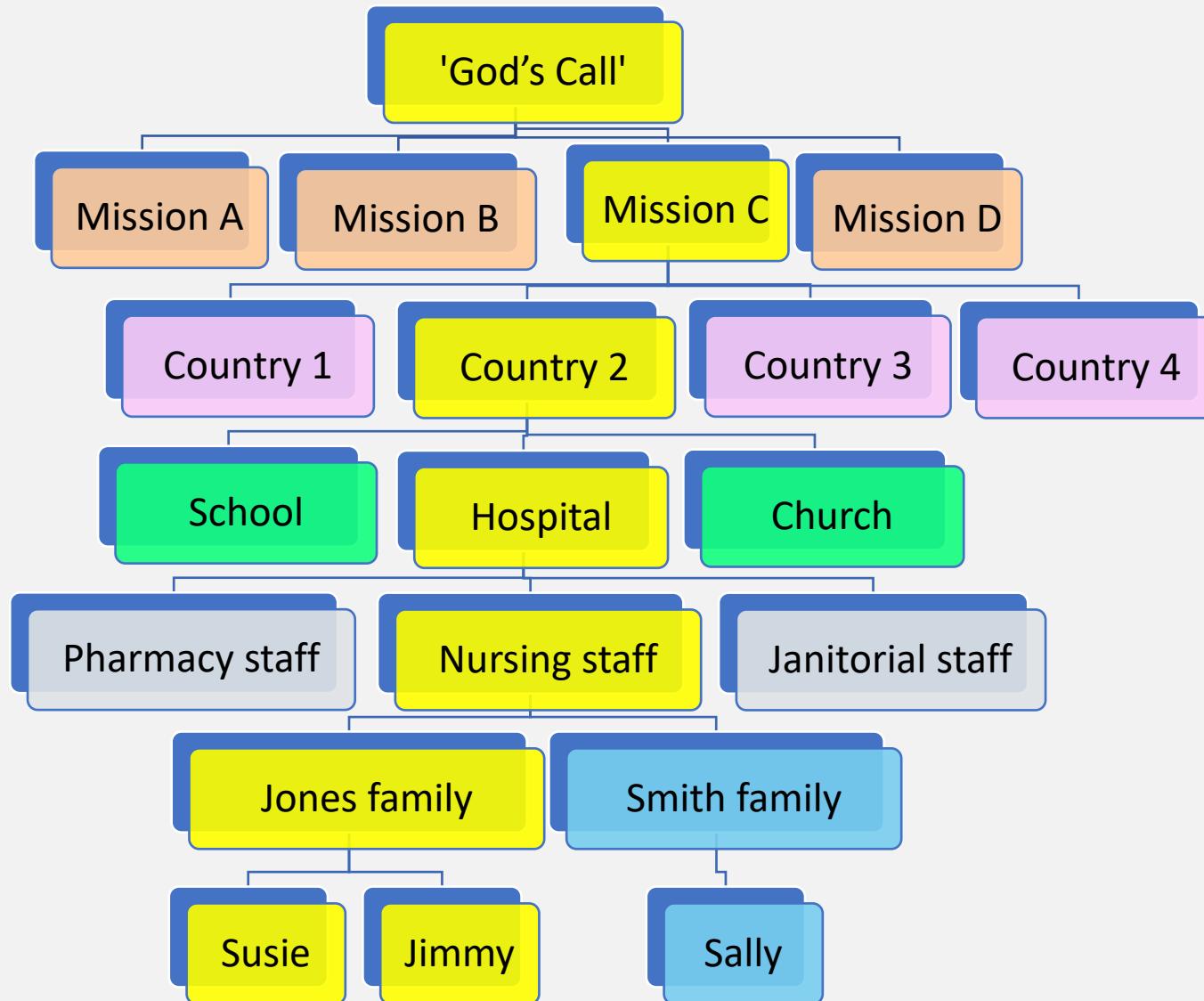
What happens when you add a boarding school system? What's missing? Why is that important?

Healthy system

Lifecycle of a Healthy System

Motivation

IDEAL, PURPOSE → Means (what kind of system)

checks, self-corrects

Individuals grow and purpose is accomplished

SYSTEM

Methods (how this particular system will work)

Means/methods are negotiable while purpose/motive remains constant
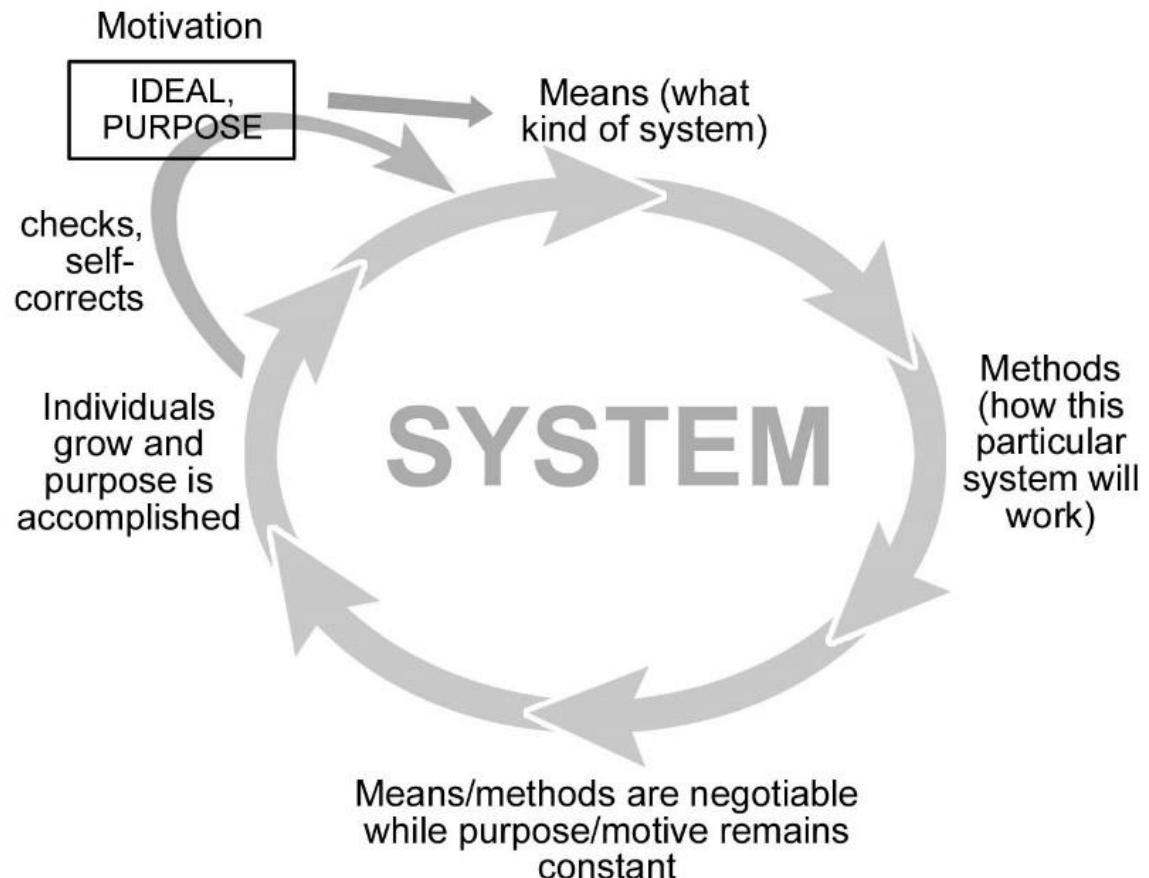
Figure Appendix A-2
Life Cycle of a Healthy System
©2003 Lois J. Bushong/Ruth E. Van Reken

Healthy system's effect

Individual in a Healthy System

Open — personal growth

fulfillment/contentment

belonging

safety

choice

respect

Boundaries

Fundamental Principles

Respect for individuals
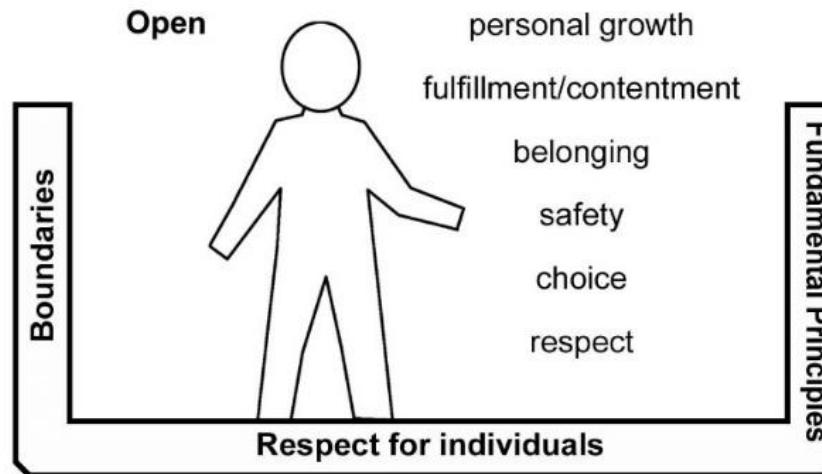
Offers stability while promoting growth and change

Appendix A-3
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Unhealthy system

Lifecycle of an Unhealthy System

Motivation

IDEAL, PURPOSE

Means (what kind of system)

RULES

RULES

Methods (how this particular system will work)

Means/ methods become rules and begin to replace purpose

RULES

RULES

SYSTEM BROKEN

Means/ methods become confused with purpose
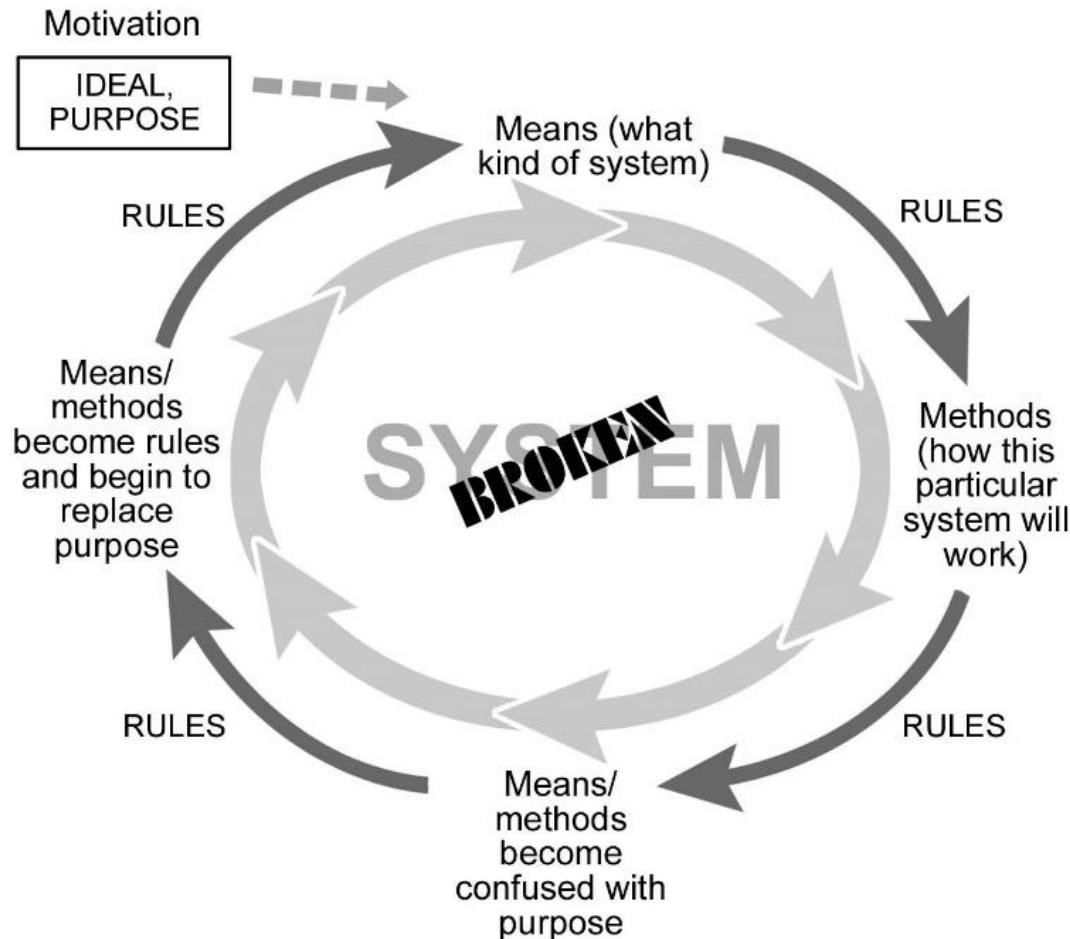
Figure Appendix A-4
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Unhealthy system's effect

Individual in an Unhealthy System

CLOSED

POWER

Absolute Rules

becomes a clone to survive

feels choiceless

fearful to leave

defensive

paranoid

Disregard for individuals
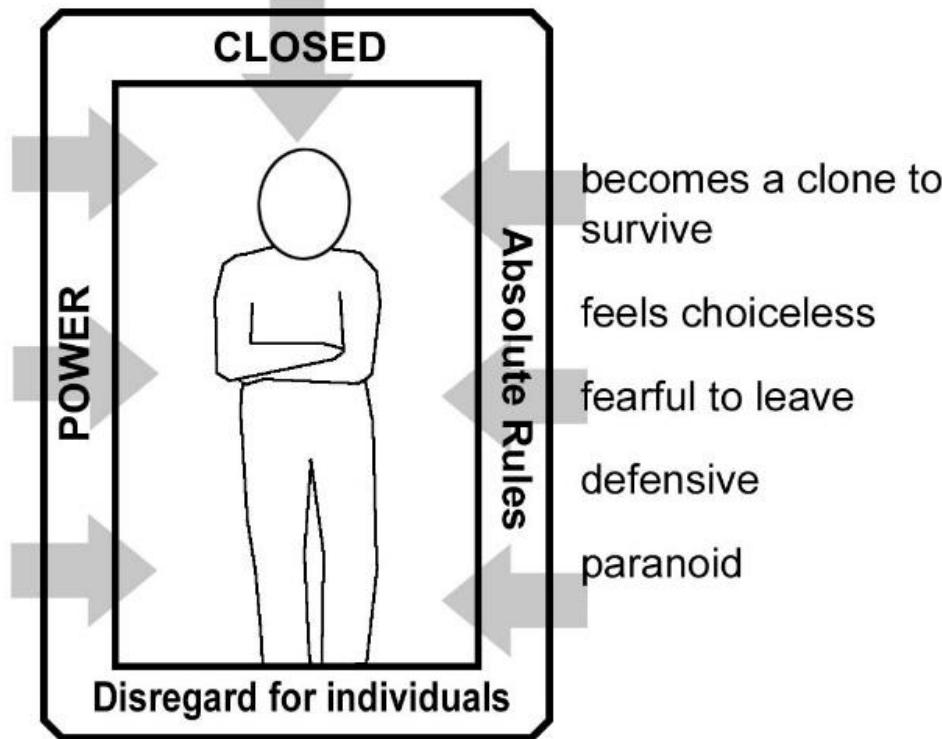
Stifles personal development and growth

Figure AppendixA-5
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Unhealthy system's cycle

Possible Outcomes of an Unhealthy System
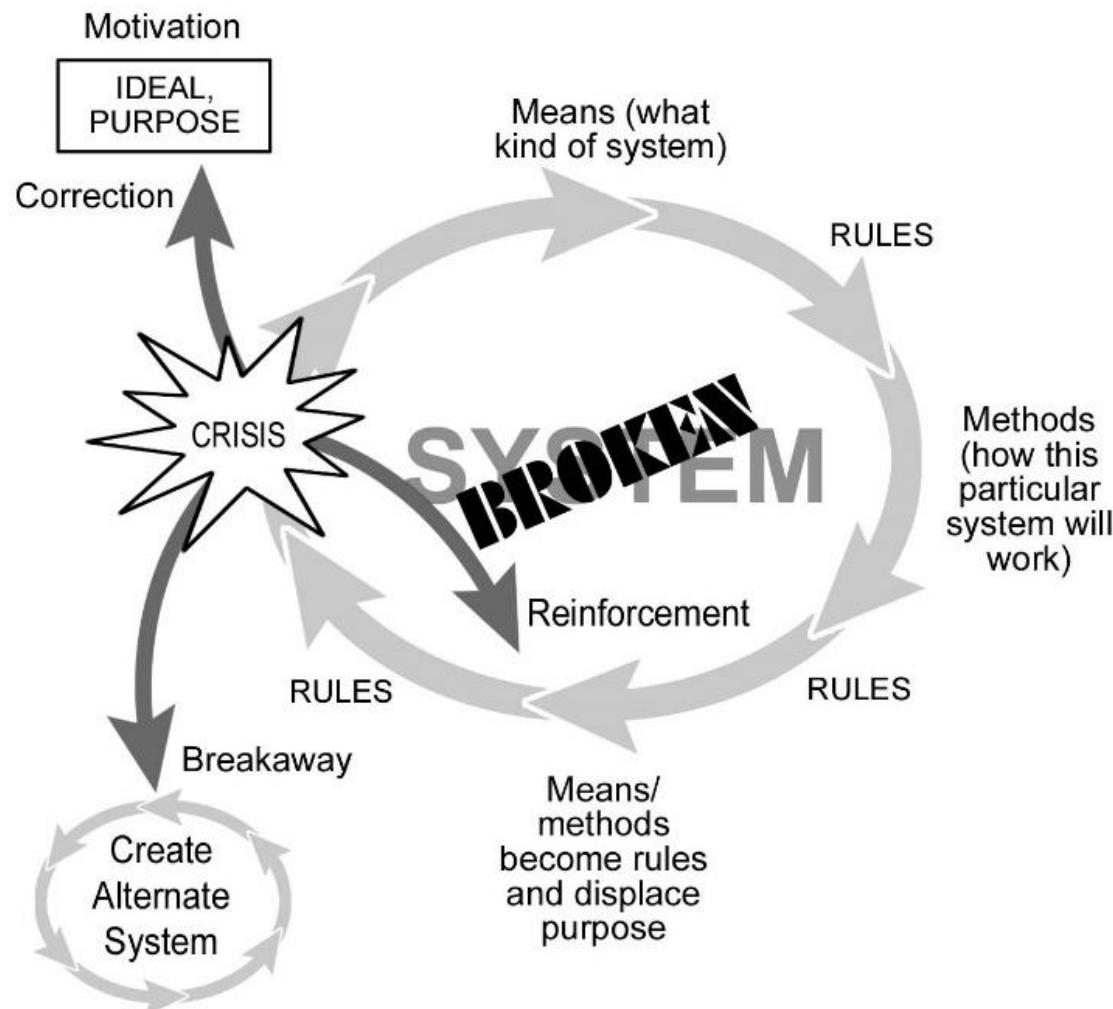
Sick system

Lifecycle of a Sick System

System preservation becomes motivation → Absolute Means (only kind of system)

Absolute Methods (only one way for this particular system to work)

Means/methods become absolute rules and displace purpose

IDEAL, PURPOSE become indistinguishable from system
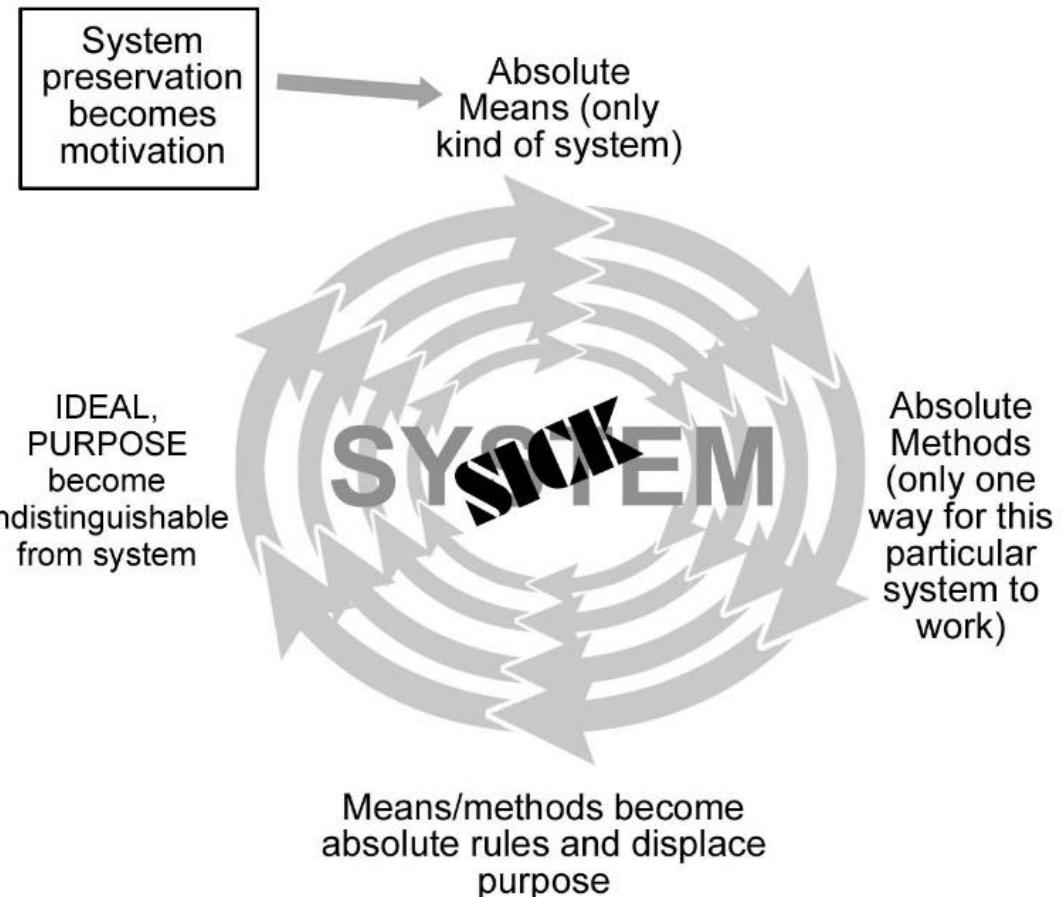
SICK

Figure Appendix A-7
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Sick

system's

effect

Individual in a Sick System

LOCKED DOWN

PURPOSE/ IDEAL
MERGED INTO SYSTEM

ABSOLUTE POWER

WARPED RULES
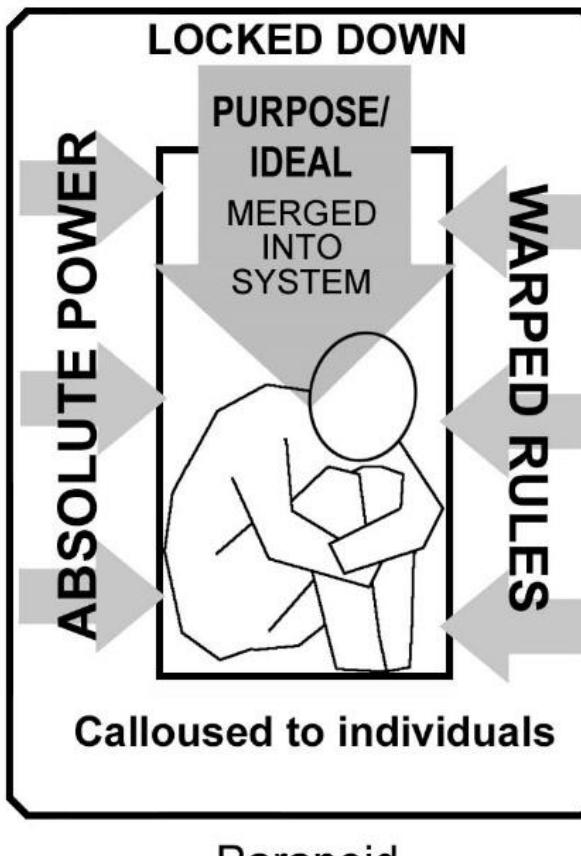
deeply wounded
confused
depressed
false guilt
shame
trapped

Calloused to individuals

Paranoid

Figure Appendix A-8
©2003 Lois J. Bushong/Ruth E. Van Reken

Why do third culture communities/systems (e.g. military, foreign service, missions, international corporations) have particular power on/over TCKs?

- The decisions of the leaders of the organization/company can trump personal, parental decisions

In addition, why do mission communities have deep impact on the MKs?

- The mission often serves as "family"
  - For many MKs, the "aunties" and "uncles" are more known to them than blood relatives

- ◉ Decisions are made according to "God's will"
 - ◉ "Every MK knows there is something between parents and God...that is the system itself"

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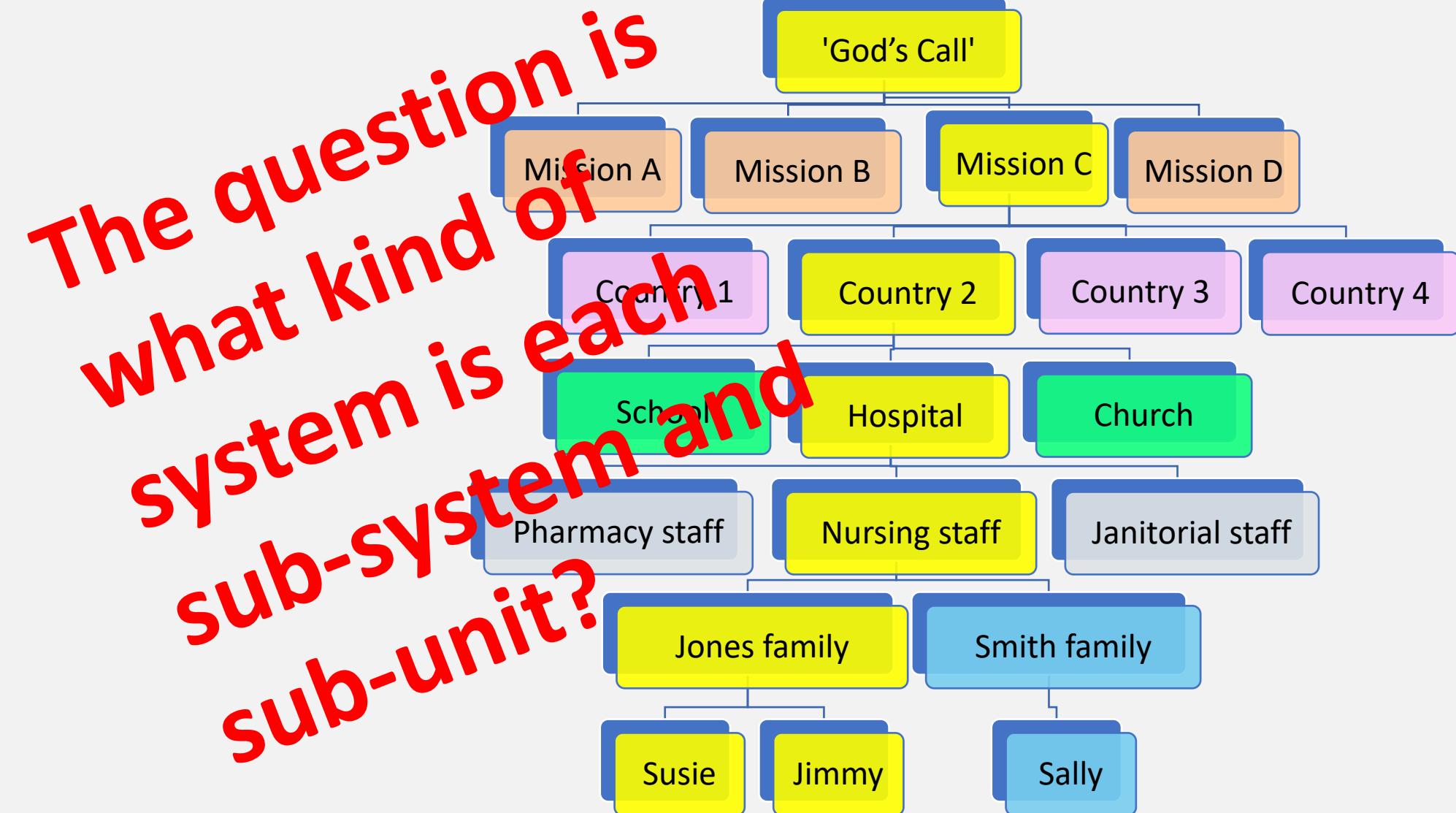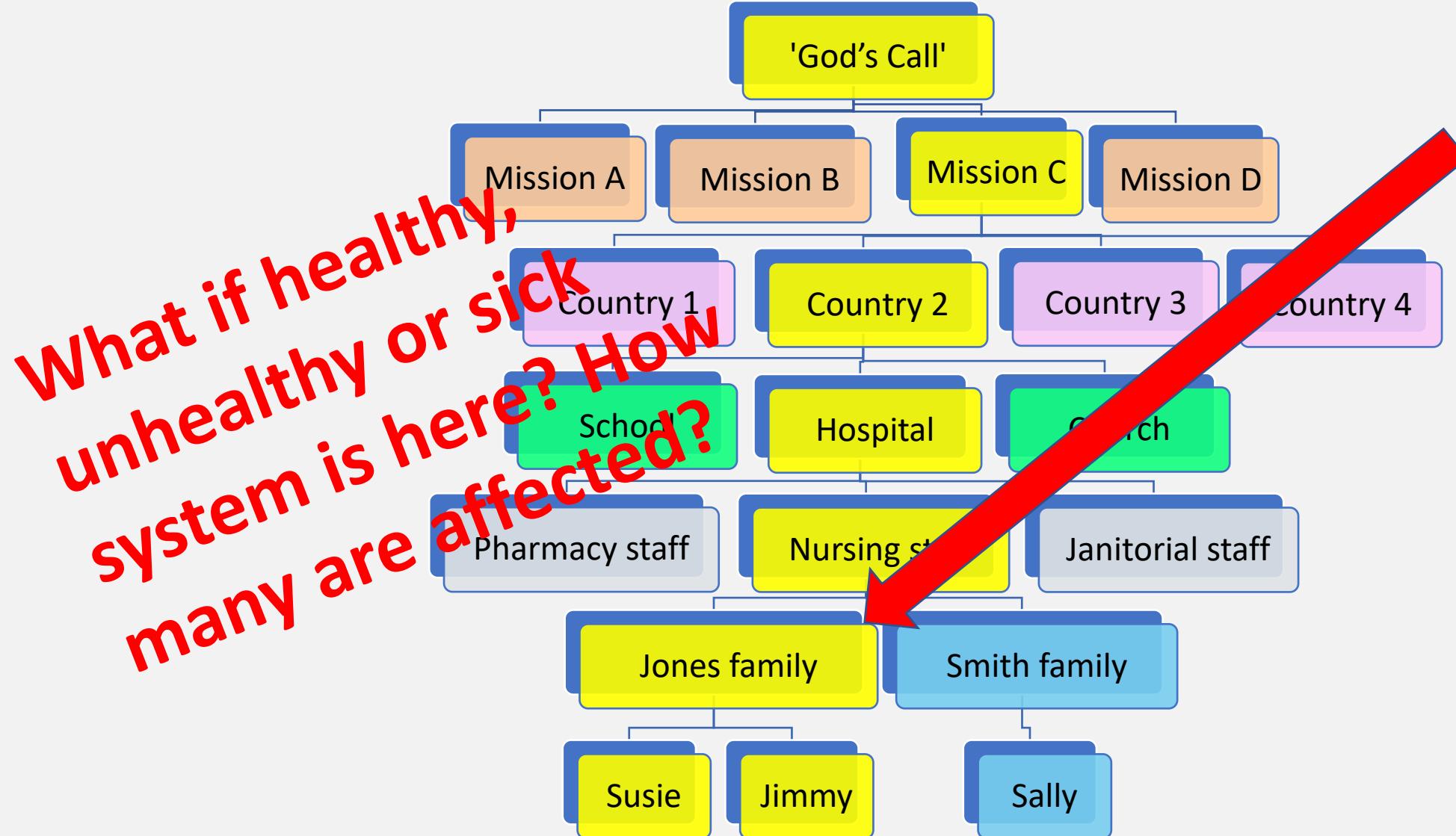
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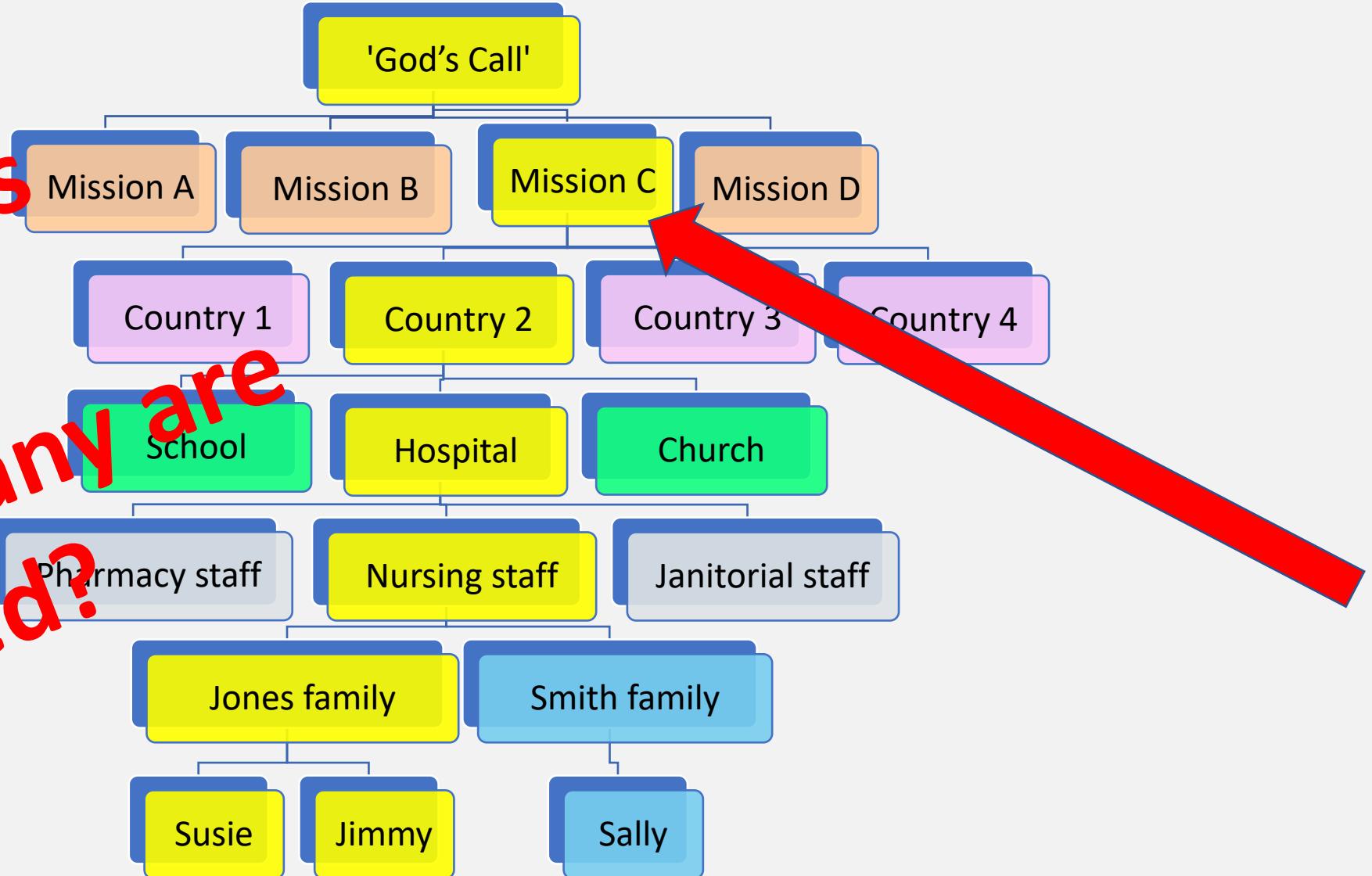
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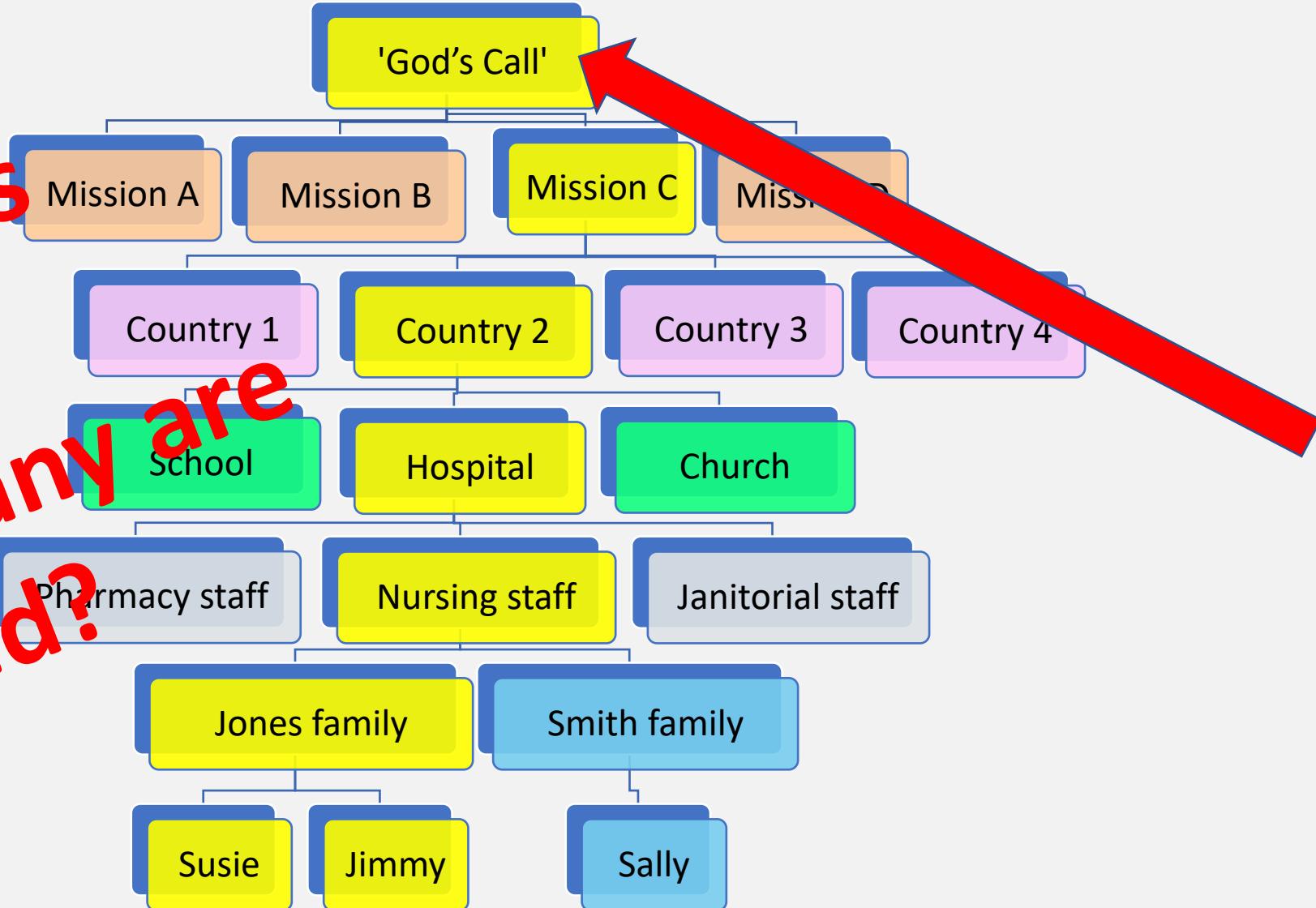
Group discussion

- What are privileges or benefits of growing up as an MK in this context?

- What are special challenges or perils of growing up as an MK in this context?

- Are there any long term 'system messages' (or ways you think about or interpret things) that you may have acquired from either/or/both these privileges and perils?

# Privileges for me growing up as an MK in this context

- Opportunity to see what I considered miracles

- Chance to learn much Biblical knowledge

Privileges for me growing up as an MK in this context

- Places where I saw people live for reasons higher than their own self interests

- High, positive, expectations of others kept me 'on track'

Paradoxical perils for me growing up as an MK in this context
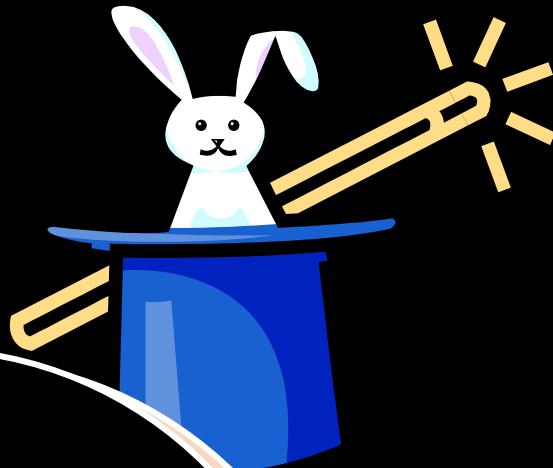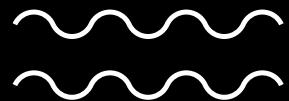
- When formulaic spiritual answers don't seem to work, where is God?

- How to turn head knowledge into true trusting relationship
  - Magical thinking

- Trying to live up to others' judgments or expectations of me can lead to shame and/or rebellion when I don't fit the system

What is potentially the Biggest Tangled Message of a religious system,(e.g. Pharisees or any God system?)

- God and the system are one.
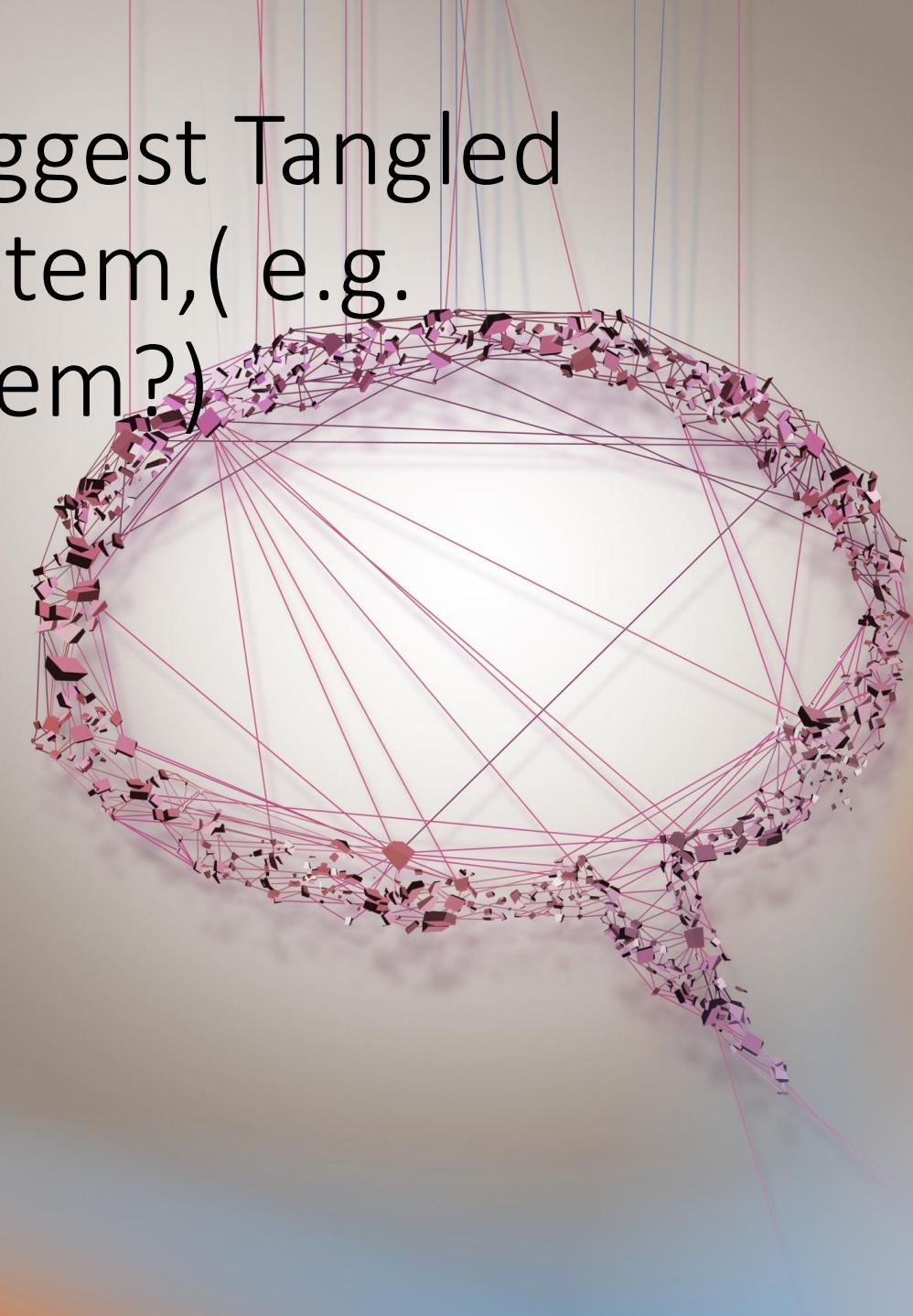
More fallout of 'Tangled Message'…

- How we see the system is how we will see God

- If you go outside the rules or expectations of the mission system, you are disobeying God

- If you go outside the rules or expectations of the mission system, you have left 'true faith'
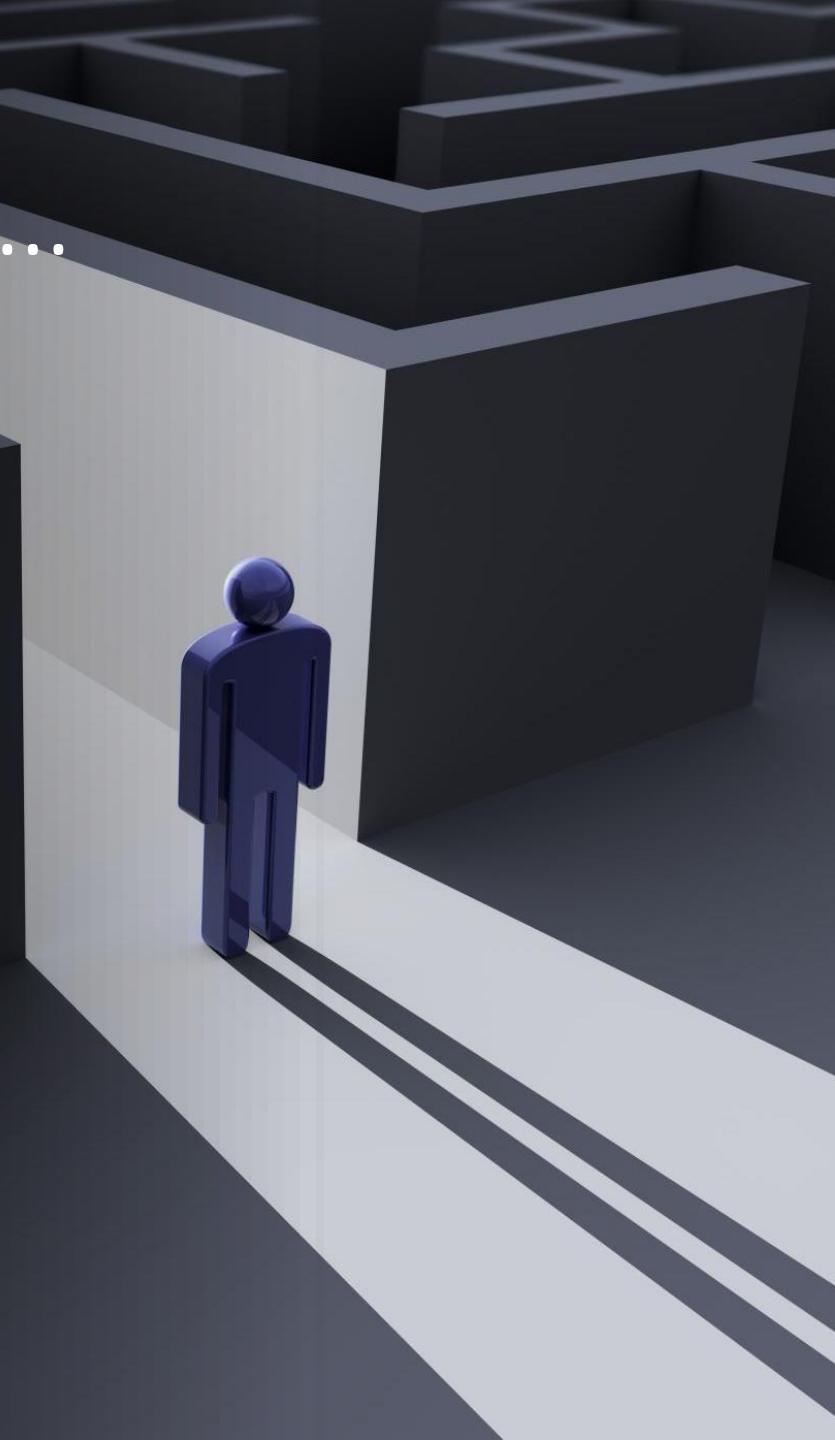
Further Fallout

- Code of silence
- About personal pain
- About others
- About the mission

What can develop?
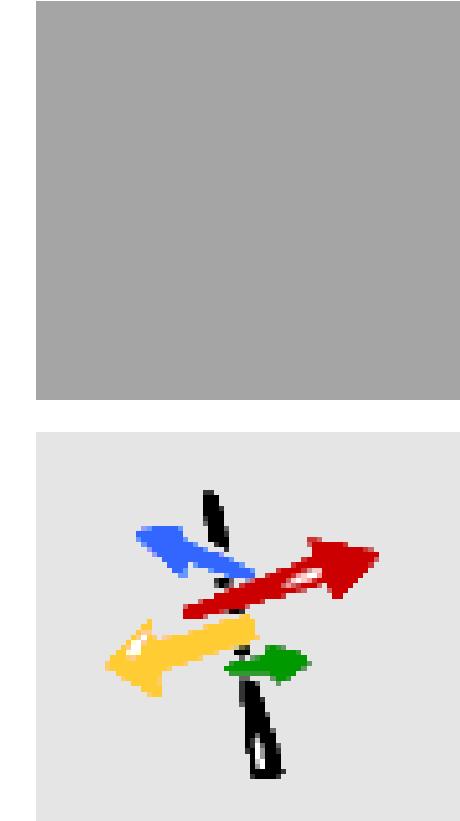
- View of God is distorted
- View of the mission is distorted
- View of missions is distorted
- View of life is distorted
- View of self is distorted

Individual's response to the system

Not fit Keps trying to fit **Shame** Win/Lose	Doesn't fit Quietly does own thing Lose/Win
Fits Win/Win	Doesn't fit Keeps proving it **Shame** Lose/Lose

From Brené Brown
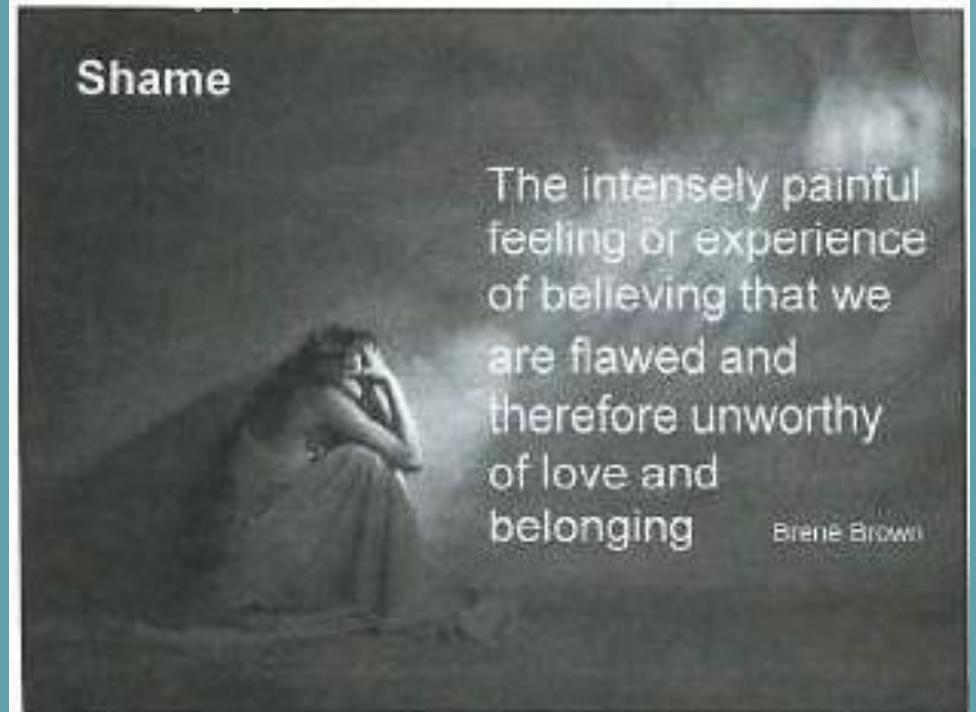
Shame

The intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging

Brene Brown

When distorted messages are believed, they result in shame

- One Lutheran (!) AMK's words to me: "Guilt is for something you have done wrong, for sin. There is a healthy shame with that but the antidote for guilt is forgiveness. Shame is for who you are but the only antidote for that is grace. Too often we try to be forgiven for who we are but as human beings we forget that we were finite before we were sinful."

One response to shame…

- One important way to deal with shaming messages is when they come to ask "Who said?" and "Is this the truth?" And if not, what IS the truth that can replace it?