

Purposeful Living

Point of the Assignment: 1) To distinguish the difference between Life Purpose*, Life Roles, and Identity. 2) To recognize how Life Roles can either support or distract you from achieving your Life Purpose*.

Often times, people are looking to find meaning and purpose for themselves and their lives. In addition, they often don't know how to distinguish the difference between Life Purpose (*reason for existence*)*, Life Roles (*what you do/your responsibilities in different settings*) and Identity (*what makes you unique/how you see yourself*). When a person can't distinguish the difference, he will likely confuse them. (*See the following pages for an illustration of this¹.*) This confusion is also likely to lead to inaccurate results on some personality, interest, and values assessments (*e.g. answering a question about personality from a "role" perspective*). When this happens, it becomes particularly challenging for them to figure out who they are and what they want out of life. In addition, people will often find that their Life Roles will distract them from achieving what they truly want in life.

1. **Use the following question to help you identify where you are getting your sense of Identity. Do this by finishing the following statement. Your statement may include more than one thing if you wish. (i.e.: "I am a cop." "I am a mother." "I am Catholic." "I am sensitive." "I am African-American.", "I am a survivor of..." etc.)**

I am... _____

2. **What does that statement reveal about where you are getting your sense of Identity from?**

3. **Give example(s) of how you get a sense of identity from one or more of your "Life Roles" (student, parent, job, etc).**

4. **Give example(s) of how you get a sense of identity from one or more of variables listed inside "The Person" (ethnicity, personality, life experience, etc)**

¹ Note: You will see that there are references to one's "spiritual life" in some assignments. Keep in mind that I include such references because for individuals who do have a spiritual life, it is usually a very significant part of who they are. To ignore the influence of spiritual life on an individual when teaching about career & life planning, I would do them a disservice. However at the same time, I do also realize that not everyone feels they have a spiritual life. As your teacher, as far as I am concerned, this is just another demographic variable in my students' lives -- just as whether or not they are married and/or have children. I understand that these variables can and WILL impact their decision-making process, and I am simply trying to accommodate those influences in my students' lives. Therefore, when it comes to "spiritual-life" references, please note that if this information does not apply to you, you are free to disregard and ignore them. This information will have no impact on your grade, and will not show up on any tests.

5. **Do you know (or have any idea about) what is your Life Purpose*?** (e.g. “a professional-level position that allows me to help other people.”)

*According to Barnes, who quotes Frederick Buechner in his book, *Wishful Thinking – A Theological ABC*, **a life purpose (or calling) is generally:**

...a work (a) that you need most to do and (b) the world most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you’ve presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing TV deodorant commercials, the chances are you’ve missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met (b), but if most of the time you’re bored and depressed by it, the chances are you haven’t only bypassed (a) but probably aren’t helping your patients much either. ... [it] is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet. (p. 12)

To be clear, in addition to identifying what a calling/life purpose is, it is also to identify what it is not: 1) It is NOT your job or career. 2) It is NOT living for just yourself (*to be happy*) or your family. In short, a calling/life purpose means living for something that is bigger than yourself and your roles.

6. **Go back and carefully study all the elements (including items inside the person) on the “Compartmentalized Living” page. As you study this page, think about whether of those elements seem to be most important to you. In your personal opinion, do you believe that any one element is “foundational to everything else in life”?** (Explain your response)

If so, this may give you a sense of your giftedness, life experience, interests and/or your passions. Feeling that one thing is more important than another can possibly also give you a clue to your own educational, occupational or ministry role and/or life’s purpose. (i.e. “*Social Life – Family*”: *Believing that a strong family foundation is more important than anything else, could be a clue that you should have education, work and/or ministry roles where you can support strong family life.*)

7. **Even if you don’t know your Life’s Purpose*, you should be able to get a sense whether or not some of your Life Roles are taking you towards it or away from it.**

a. **Identify which of your Life Roles are taking towards your Life Purpose**

b. **Identify which of your Life Roles are taking away from your Life Purpose**

8. **Are there any Life Roles (2 or more) that are trying to take you in the same direction?**
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9. **Are there any Life Roles (2 or more) that are competing with each other, and therefore pulling you in different directions?**

10. What can you do to improve the odds that your Life Roles are in alignment, and therefore taking you in the same direction?

Test your understanding:

What is the main point of this assignment?

Why were you expected to do this exercise?

What type of person would need to do this exercise?

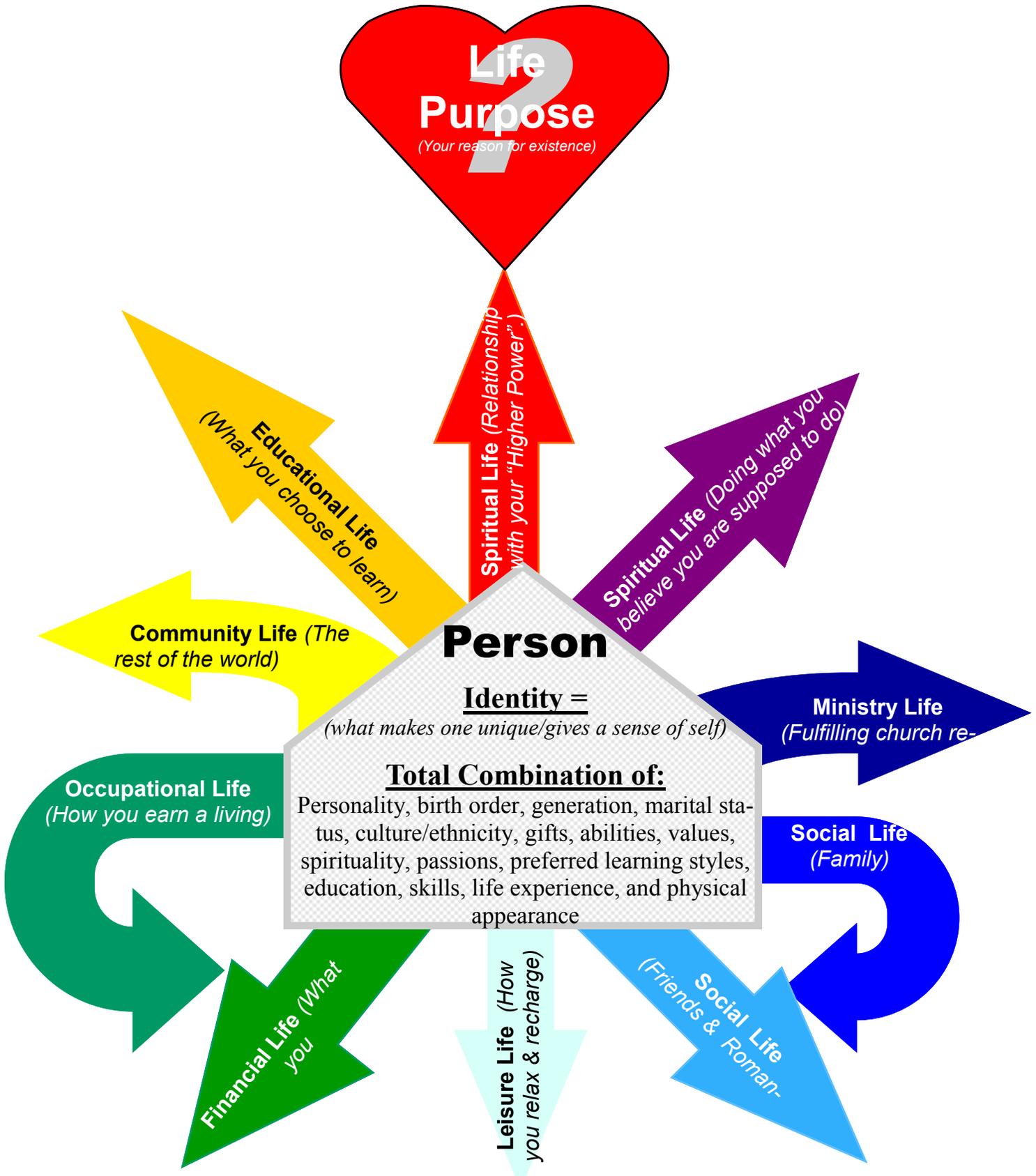
How well do you fit the profile of the person for whom this assignment was created?

Reflection: (*Write down your response after completing this assignment.*)

References:

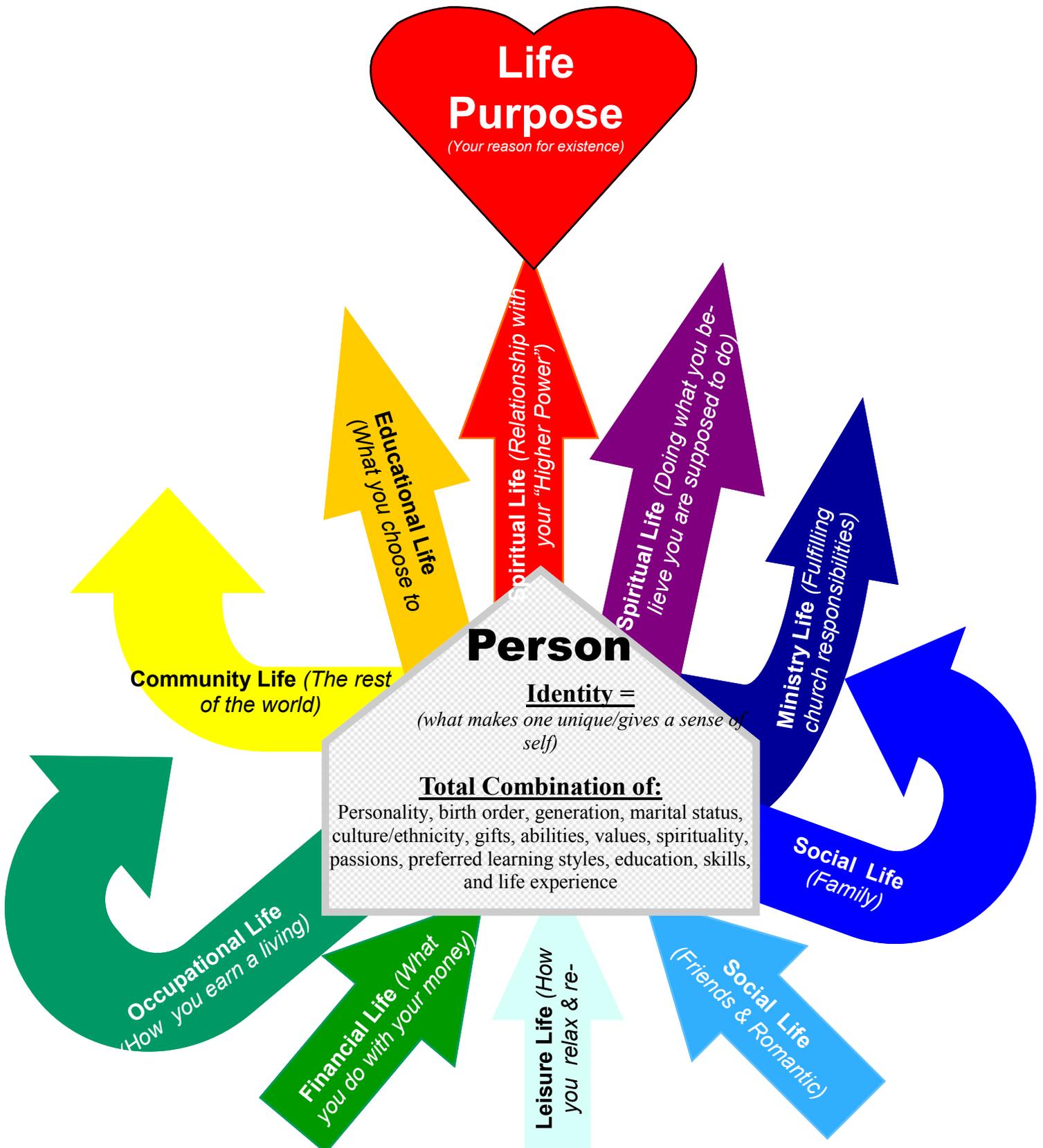
- Barnes, G.P. (1992). The vocation triangle: A three-tiered model. (Unpublished).
- Palmer, P. J. (2000). Let your life speak. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

A Compartmentalized Life



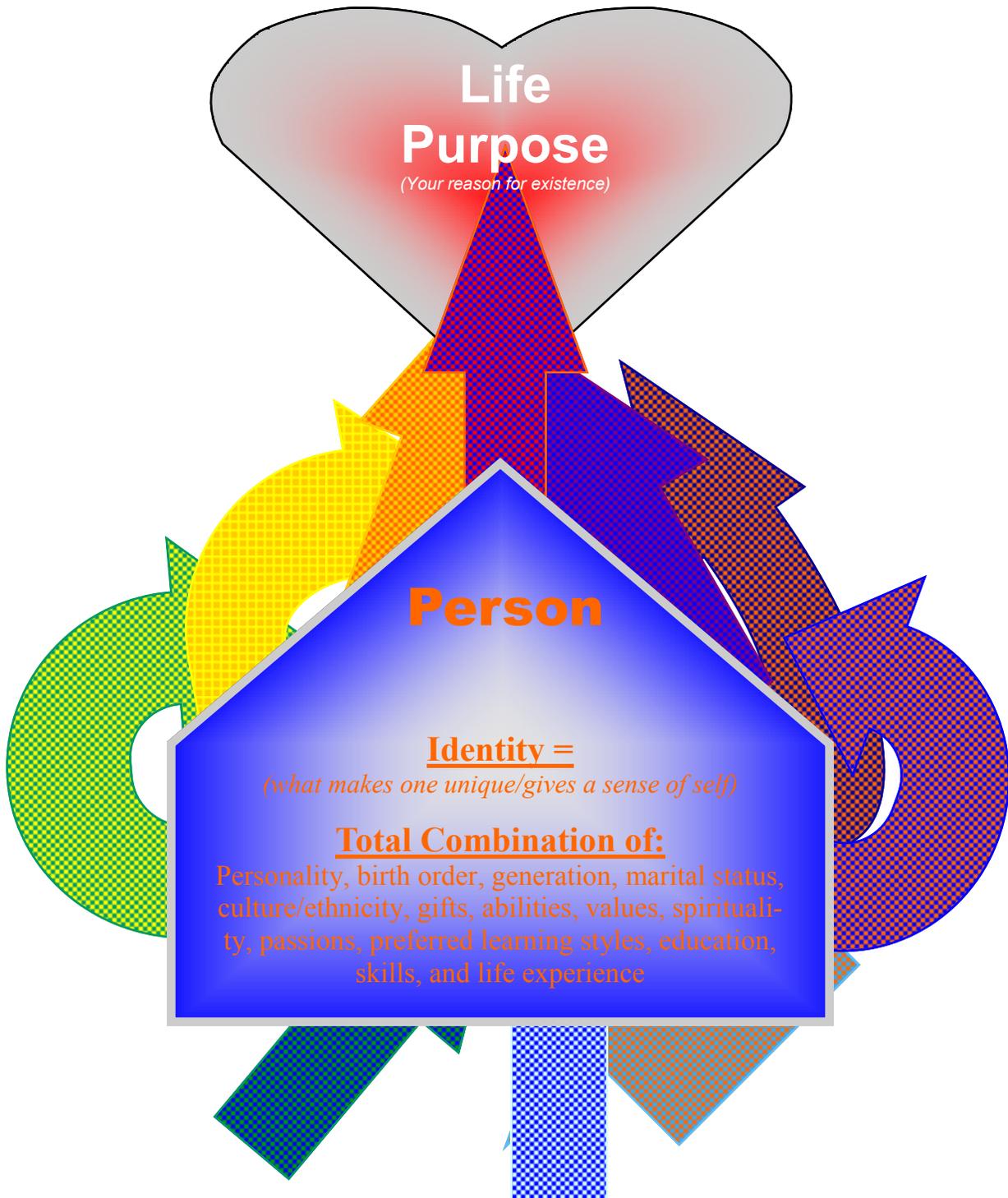
A person who lives a compartmentalized life usually finds that his various life roles will conflict with each other, and often these various roles will pull him in different directions at the same time. The compartmentalized life is often characterized by stress, and an inability to visualize his life purpose.

Living a Purposeful Life



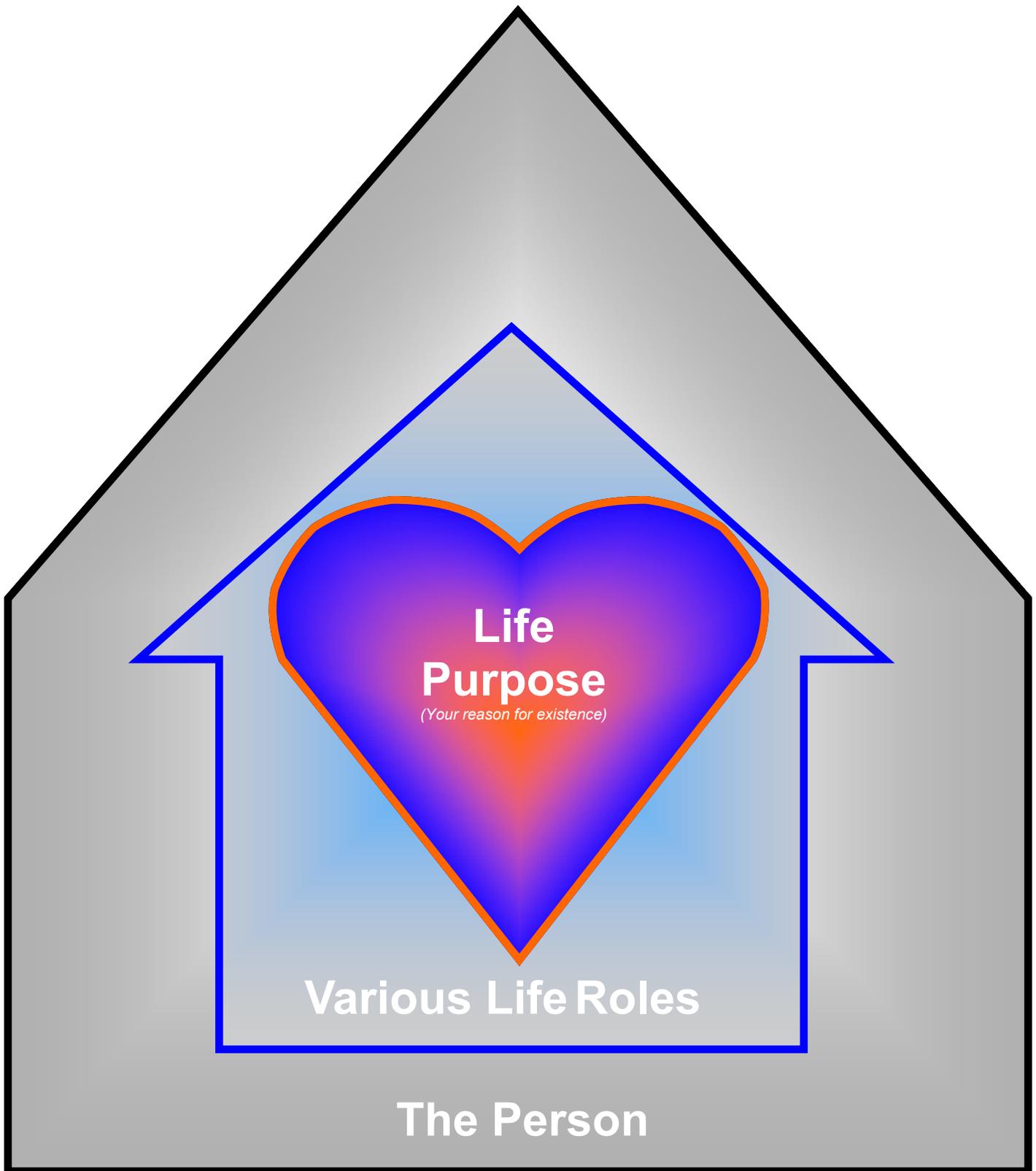
When a person knows what is his ultimate life's purpose, he will find it becomes much easier for him to become aware of how his different life roles can be pulling him in many different directions at the same time. Because he knows what is his life purpose, he finds making difficult decisions a little easier to make because he knows whether the consequences of those decisions will take him away from, or towards his ultimate life purpose. When he knows what he is working for, then sacrifice is easier.

A Merging Life



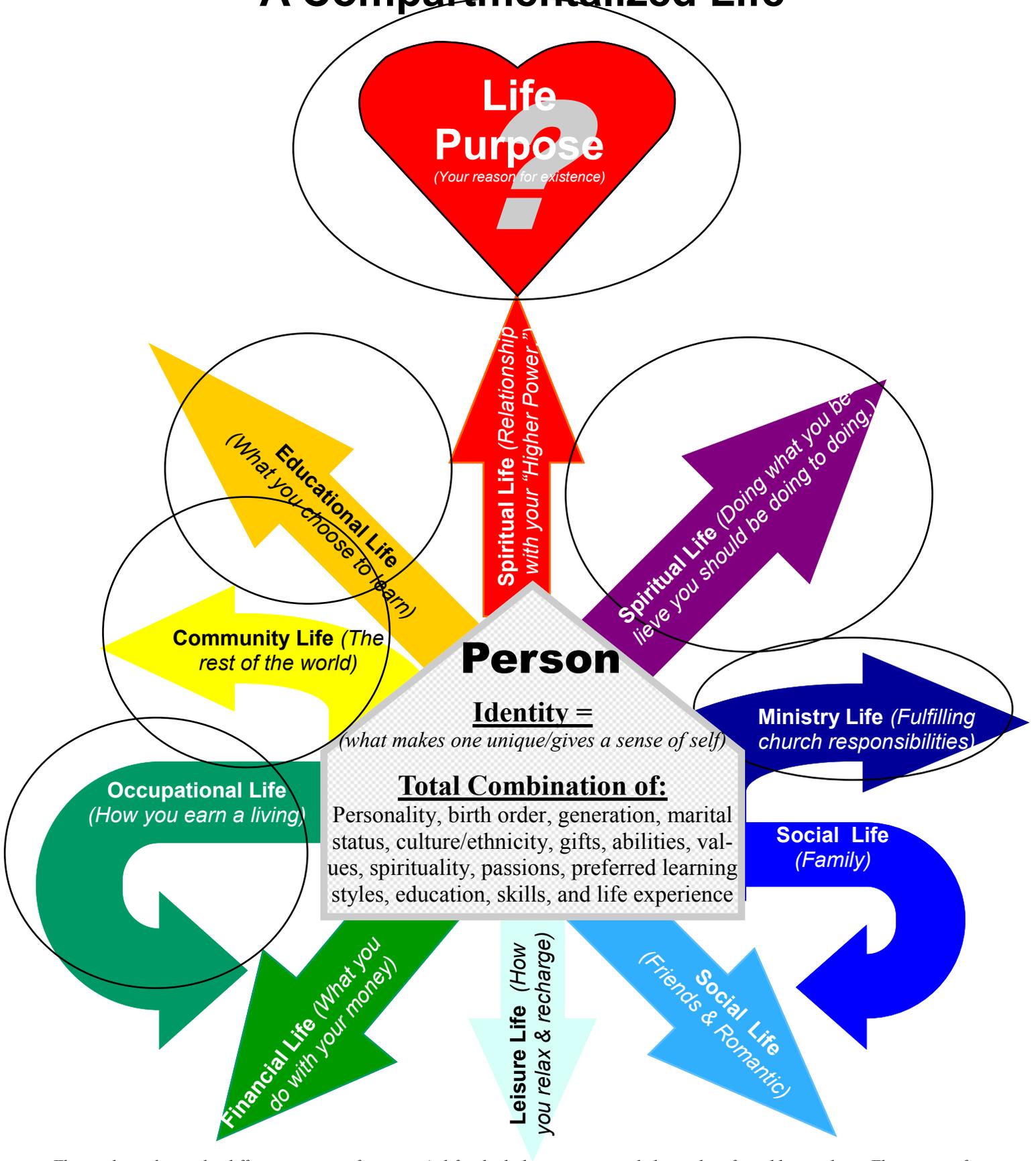
A person whose life is merging can see how her various life roles are beginning to fit together. The distinctions that used to separate them become less obvious. She can also see how her life purpose is a reflection of how she has been uniquely designed. As she can see the pieces fit together, she can see how every aspect of her life — self, purpose and roles — are overflowing into and changing each other.

An Integrated Life



The person whose life is integrated will discover that the different parts of her (person, various life roles, and life purpose) all line up, fit together, blend, and point in the same direction. All of these components work together instead of against each other. Consequently, she discovers that her life is characterized by peace rather than stress.

A Compartmentalized Life



The circles indicate the different aspects of a person's life which this process can help to identify and bring about. The process for finding and achieving all of these goals is very similar. When choosing to take this journey, the person will decide which, if not all, of these arrows, he or she wants to address. Therefore, each person's journey will be somewhat unique based on desired goals. All the other life roles will be addressed only as they affect the goals of the journey.