TRANSCENDING POTLUCK

People around the world today are divided by things like race, politics, and vaccination status. This penchant for division stretches all the way back to the Garden of Eden, for the first thing Adam and Eve did after they fell was attack each other: Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the snake (Gen. 3:12, 13). Sadly, we hear of such divisions in the home and church too, for fallen humans can almost always find a reason to be divided, even if it's just over styles of music or the color of the church carpet.

The name of the peace or fellowship offering is related to the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means “peace” or “well-being.” Found in Leviticus 3 and 7, this offering is a strong reminder to live in peace and fellowship with one another. The sweet peace we have with God through Jesus should inspire us to seek peace with each other. God wants us to press together in these last days, not pull away (Heb. 10:25).

The fellowship offering was the only one that allowed the offeror to eat part of the sacrifice. The offeror, out of thanksgiving or because of a vow, brought a sacrifice to the temple, where it would be divided three ways: God received the fat burned on the altar, the priest received the breast and shoulder, and the offeror received whatever was left (Lev. 3:16; 7:14, 15, 31, 34). The offeror shared this meal with their family and with others connected to their household at God’s appointed place near the tabernacle (Deut. 12:6, 7, 17, 18). This shared meal was a time of rejoicing, for it celebrated a close connection with God and a tight fellowship with one another. God deeply values fellowship and peace among His people.
Write out Leviticus 3 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Leviticus 3:16, 17. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
FULL FELLOWSHIP

Of all the offerings in Leviticus, the peace offering is the only one for which the instructions contain no promise of forgiveness or atonement. They mention nothing about sin, illustrating the dynamics of God’s love that go beyond dealing with the sin problem. This offering is a testimony of God’s desire for a personal connection with us. The whole ceremony is a divine invitation to be in close communion with God.

The peace offering was also the only one in which the person making the sacrifice partook of the meal. This meal was divided into three parts: God received the fat of the offering, burned on the altar “as food” (Lev. 3:11, 16), the priest received the breast and right thigh (Lev. 7:31–34), and the offeror received whatever was left (Lev. 7:15, 16). This was no casual meal, but a sacred ceremony, holy to the Lord. It was so serious and important that anybody who disregarded the ceremonial guidelines was to be cut off from God’s people (Lev. 7:20, 21).

A person could have various motivations for bringing a peace offering, and specific instructions were given to those who brought a peace offering because of a vow or as a voluntary gift (Lev. 7:16). However, the peace offering was designed to be an expression of thanksgiving to God (Lev. 7:11–15), a fact supported by how Leviticus sometimes refers to this offering as the “sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Lev. 7:12, 13; 22:29).

Perhaps the kind of worship dynamic exemplified by the peace offering is the experience missing for many believers and churches today. Perhaps a lack of thanksgiving and praise has too often robbed us of real companionship with God. What if God is just waiting, longing for willing participants who will embrace the kind of fellowship with God that the ceremony of the peace offering promises?

The New Testament writer John could think of nothing more desirable than the people in his churches enjoying the rich fellowship with God that is possible only through Jesus (1 John 1:3, 4). Today God is looking for people who will prioritize fellowship with Him above every other connection in the world.

Communion with God requires a certain withdrawal from communion with the world, for the allegiance to God that is symbolized by the peace offering does not mix with any allegiance to the world (1 Cor. 10:21). This offering showed that a person was committed to their relationship with the Lord and to excluding every false god. There are endless connections in the world that beg to supplant a deep connection with God. The ancient Israelites could have done nothing more incongruent, more scandalous, and more hurtful than when they bowed to a golden calf very shortly after offering burnt offerings and peace offerings to God (Exod. 32:5–8). The peace offering is a pledge of wholehearted devotion to the Lord.
THE BRIDGE OVER SOCIAL DISTANCE

Interestingly, the fellowship or peace offering meal was time-sensitive; the offeror and his or her family (as well as the priest) had to eat the food on the same day if it was a thanksgiving offering and within two days if it was a vow or freewill offering (Lev. 7:15, 16). This was, of course, for health reasons, but it was also to encourage the offeror to gather the family together quickly to consume all the allotted meat from the goat, lamb, or cow that was sacrificed. There is a subtle but crucial lesson in this: Discord should never be allowed to fester. Hard feelings and misunderstandings should be quickly confronted and cleared up (see also Eph. 4:26). Make things right quickly, unite over a meal if necessary, but don’t ignore the issues and hope they go away. They most certainly will not!

If parents want to get connected or stay connected with their children, they should share at least one fellowship meal with them every day. This means no television, no cell phones; just sitting around the table hearing about each other’s day—the challenges, joys, and heartaches. This may be the most important activity a family does together. Although it is not easy to do this consistently, it can be done, and the rewards are fellowship and peace with the ones you love.

People need fellowship with one another; it’s a psychological need. For many months, people around the world were told to “social distance” from each other. Of course, this was for their good so that they did not catch the COVID virus, but in retrospect, we should have called it something else. Perhaps “physical distancing” would’ve been a better name—anything but social distancing. In the vacuum created by socially distancing ourselves from each other, we saw massive increases in violence, racial discord, political hatred, depression, and suicide.

When we think about God, we often imagine Him as a white-haired old man living “upstairs,” separate from us in every way, but God is actually very youthful and has at least one characteristic in common with the younger generation living today: He is a social being! He loves fellowship and wants us to have fulfilling relationships with not only each other but with Him as well. This is why the fellowship offering was both vertical and horizontal: those who participated shared a meal with not only each other (horizontal) but with God, too (vertical).

One last thing about this offering: the offeror was the one who initiated the fellowship. In other words, the individual who brought the sacrifice was the one who brought others together in peace and fellowship. We live in a world in which everyone wants everyone else to be the one to initiate reconciliation, forgiveness, peace, and fellowship, but as recipients of Jesus’ grace, we must be the first to initiate fellowship—not the other person. God has called us to be initiators who represent Christ Himself.

Read more at
www.inversebible.org/stw04-4
inSpect

What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Deuteronomy 12:6–19
Isaiah 9:6
Matthew 18:15–20
Romans 5:1
Romans 12:18–21

What other verses come to mind in connection with Leviticus 3?

(Cont. from inVite, p. 38):
forgive and love others? Because Jesus first loved and forgave us! Jesus is our motivation to sit at a fellowship meal with each other. The emulsifying power of the cross can make our unity with one another permanent—not superficial, but eternal; not temporal, but authentic! Jesus put it beautifully when He said, “They will know you are My disciples by your love” (John 13:35, paraphrased).

(Cont. from inSight, p. 39):
“The spirit of peace is evidence of their connection with heaven. The sweet savor of Christ surrounds them. The fragrance of the life, the loveliness of the character, reveal to the world the fact that they are children of God. Men take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus” (Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956], pp. 27, 28).

Review your memorized verse from Leviticus 3.
THE KINGDOM OF PEACEMAKERS

As with all the offerings in Leviticus, the fellowship offering pointed to the coming Messiah, Jesus. It was through His shed blood at Calvary that we experience peace not only with each other but with God as well. No wonder the fellowship offering in Leviticus 3 required a sacrifice. God wanted His people to know that all well-being, peace, unity, and warm-hearted fellowship are results of the cross. God will have a people who will not allow themselves to be divided by color, culture, community, or country. These people will press together in Christian love and allow the cross of Christ to do its work of tearing down “the middle wall of separation” between all believers (Eph. 2:14). We can understand why Paul called the message of the cross a “mystery,” especially when we consider how divided the world is today!

Interestingly, the fellowship offerings find its way into modern churches through the communion service. The thirteenth Sabbath is often reserved for communion in Adventist churches. This is a special time for the church to gather in solidarity and fellowship around the symbols of the body and blood of Christ. Communion is a time when the church, local and global alike, shares a small meal in peace and fellowship. As we stare at the cross and observe all Jesus has done for us—how He crossed over into our cultures and communities and was victimized by us and yet returned our mistreatment with boundless grace and love, we are convicted and moved to change the way we relate to others, even to those deemed “our enemies.”

As offerors laid their hand upon the fellowship offering and killed it, they were given an opportunity to look into the future and see the amazing sacrifice Jesus made to bring us all together in fellowship (see Eph. 2:13). We pursue peace and fellowship with each other because of the cross and the example our Savior gave us. Notice that the Bible does not say, “Blessed are the peacekeepers”; it says, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9)! In other words, peace and fellowship with others, especially with those within the body of Christ, requires effort. In fact, Matthew 5:23, 24 says to leave your offering at the altar (probably a reference to the fellowship offering) if you have an issue with someone and be reconciled to them. Like Jesus, who laid down everything in order to bring us atonement (forgiveness, peace, and right standing with God through His blood), Christians are to do everything they can to be at peace with each other (Rom. 12:18). This, of course, does not mean everyone will appreciate our efforts or respond in kind, but this is to be our objective whether it is reciprocated or not.

Jesus is the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering! He is the One who gave everything for us and was crushed and beaten like fine flour for our sins, and He is the reason we have been restored to fellowship with each other and with God. Why should we be reconciled to others? Because Jesus reconciled us to Himself! Why should we (cont. on p. 37)
THE PRINCE OF PEACE

“It is fellowship with Christ, personal contact with a living Saviour, that enables the mind and heart and soul to triumph over the lower nature. Tell the wanderer of an almighty hand that will hold him up, of an infinite humanity in Christ that pities him. It is not enough for him to believe in law and force, things that have no pity, and never hear the cry for help. He needs to clasp a hand that is warm, to trust in a heart full of tenderness. Keep his mind stayed upon the thought of a divine presence ever beside him, ever looking upon him with pitying love. Bid him think of a Father's heart that ever grieves over sin, of a Father's hand stretched out still, of a Father's voice saying, 'Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace.' Isaiah 27:5, KJV.

“As you engage in this work, you have companions unseen by human eyes. Angels of heaven were beside the Samaritan who cared for the wounded stranger. Angels from the heavenly courts stand by all who do God's service in ministering to their fellow men. And you have the cooperation of Christ Himself. He is the Restorer, and as you work under His supervision, you will see great results.

“Upon your faithfulness in this work not only the well-being of others but your own eternal destiny depends. Christ is seeking to uplift all who will be lifted to companionship with Himself, that we may be one with Him as He is one with the Father. He permits us to come in contact with suffering and calamity in order to call us out of our selfishness; He seeks to develop in us the attributes of His character—compassion, tenderness, and love. By accepting this work of ministry we place ourselves in His school, to be fitted for the courts of God. By rejecting it, we reject His instruction, and choose eternal separation from His presence.

“'If thou wilt keep my charge,' the Lord declares, 'I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by'—even among the angels that surround His throne. Zechariah 3:7, KJV. By cooperating with heavenly beings in their work on earth, we are preparing for their companionship in heaven. (Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900, 1941], pp. 388, 389).

“Christ is ‘the Prince of Peace’ (Isaiah 9:6), and it is His mission to restore to earth and heaven the peace that sin has broken. ‘Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Romans 5:1, KJV. Whoever consents to renounce sin and open his heart to the love of Christ, becomes a partaker of this heavenly peace.

“There is no other ground of peace than this. The grace of Christ received into the heart, subdues enmity; it allays strife and fills the soul with love. He who is at peace with God and his fellow men cannot be made miserable. Envy will not be in his heart; evil surmisings will find no room there; hatred cannot exist. The heart that is in harmony with God is a partaker of the peace of heaven and will diffuse its blessed influence on all around. The spirit of peace will rest like dew upon hearts weary and troubled with worldly strife.

“Christ's followers are sent to the world with the message of peace. Whoever, by the quiet, unconscious influence of a holy life, shall reveal the love of Christ; whoever, by word or deed, shall lead another to renounce sin and yield his heart to God, is a peacemaker. . . .

(Cont. on p. 37)
inQuire

Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

In what ways does the fellowship offering point to Jesus?

How does your home and church family fellowship together that has stood out to you?

What could you proactively do to encourage more fellowship?

What actions or steps could you take to start regular family meals in your home? If you already have them, share how they are beneficial to you and the family.

Why does having a meal together have the potential of turning an enemy into a friend?

How can we minister to people who are discouraged, depressed, or even suicidal?

How is God using you to bring peace to people who are divided by various things?

How do you think the foot washing portion of the communion service helps to heal hurt and discord within the church?