RECEIVING PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

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Category: Observations

I've always been slightly uneasy about the statement that prayer changes things. As far as I can see, prayer doesn't change things; God changes things in answer to the prayers. It might seem a bit of a picky thing to say, but it is important. God is Sovereign and he chooses to act in response to our prayers - it isn't that our prayers have some sort of magic property in and of themselves to change things. I suppose there is a sense in which the act of praying does change the person doing the praying, but that is rather a special case.

Recently, I seem to have heard a lot about people 'receiving prayer' along the lines of the phrase "stay behind after the service if you would like to receive prayer".

Once again, I may be being too picky, but surely people don't receive prayer, God does. We pray to God on behalf of other people. Of course there is a value in praying for people and experience tells me that having people pray for you when you are physically present can be a real encouragement. But the ultimate value of the prayer lies in the fact that God listens to our prayers and chooses to act in response to them. It isn't about the prayer, it's about God.

I wonder, am I being too picky? Is saying "would you like to receive prayer" just a fashionable way of asking if someone would like you to pray for them? Linguistically sloppy, perhaps, but ultimately not something to get worked up about. Or, does this new way of speaking about prayer actually reflect a view that prayer is somehow magical in and of itself and that the act of praying is all that is needed to convey change?

On balance, I suspect that this neologism reflects nothing more than a loose use of language. However, given the way that language can shape our ideas, I am worried that if we keep talking about people "receiving prayers" we will end up getting our theology of prayer somewhat confused.

By the way, if you would like to pray to God for Sue and I and the work we do, we would be more than grateful! You can sign up for our regular prayer emails in the box in the sidebar.