

Chapter 15

On the Computer

Between work, e-mail, Web searches, instant messaging, and games, many of us spend hours in front of the computer each day. The computer makes our tasks faster and easier. It also offers us the temptation to fritter away the hours of the day. The compulsion to check our e-mails, contact a friend, or Google some interesting subject can keep us from exercise, relationships, community service, prayer, and work. It is sometimes difficult to sort out the wheat from the chaff.

In an attempt to keep my priorities straight and my compulsions in check, on the first login of the day I read fixed-hour prayers. I go to the website www.explorefaith.org and look for “Pray the Divine Hours.” What I find are prayers designed for the hours between 6 AM and 9 AM—one of the “seven times a day” that the psalmist suggests we praise God (Ps. 119:164 RSV). I spend three to five minutes reading a combination of Psalms, a Gospel reading, the Lord’s Prayer, and other prayers and recitations. **It reminds me that God comes first**, even when the proportion of time spent in prayer pales next to my other activities on the computer. Actually, I can go back to

that site several times a day and find a new set of prayers for each three-hour period of the day.

It occurred to me one day that maybe I could “pray in color” on the computer. **It started off as a frivolous notion**, really. And then I tried it. I went to my word-processing program and pulled up the drawing tool. I picked a ready-made shape and typed in the name of someone on my prayer list. I attached other smaller shapes, lines, and designs. Another icon on the toolbar added fill color; another changed the color of the lines. Fifteen minutes of typing, clicking, copying, pasting, coloring, filling . . . and the result was a prayer drawing, or as I have come to call it, an icon.

It felt a little like cheating. My own hand had not drawn the shapes. They were perfect squares, ovals, and triangles. The coloring was regular and even. But what struck me was that the process had been meditative. The clicking and copying had a rhythm that settled me and helped me pay attention to the people I prayed for. I had hesitantly invited God into the process, and I felt as though the invitation had been accepted. It is an ongoing mystery to me that the Holy Spirit visits the most mundane of circumstances. Whenever we claim that God is eternally unchangeable, I wonder. Maybe one of God’s unchangeable characteristics is adaptability. The One who “makes all things new” meets us wherever we can be found—even in the nano-spaces of our new and sometimes wacky innovations and diversions.

Praying on the computer feels a little different from drawing on paper. The whole idea seems just a little weird. **But the bottom line is, “Have I prayed?”** Have I spent intentional time in the presence of God praying for the people I care about? The comparison may be similar to reading a novel or listening to a novel on tape. Some people would argue that it doesn’t count if you don’t *read* the words yourself. Others would argue that listening requires a different kind of concentration that is no less sophisticated than seeing the words. Both involve a





journey with the end result of knowing the story. Praying on paper and praying on the computer both have a process and product that are of equal importance.

One advantage to drawing on the computer is that the result is then *on* the computer. If you spend hours a day near a computer, you have easy access to your drawings. You can print the finished drawing. You can save it in a folder labeled *Prayers*. Or instead of closing the file, just minimize it so you can pray throughout the day with just a single click. Or turn it into your screen saver of the week.


Having the icon on the computer is also a natural way to start a visual prayer chain. Send the prayers to other people via e-mail and ask them to pray also. Send icons back and forth across the ether, filling it with prayers for healing and blessing.

To get started, explore the various ways to draw on your computer. It might be that your word processor has a drawing utility within it, or you might have a separate application. Most of the computer programs I use have their own unique and irritating personalities to understand.


Becoming familiar with the possibilities before you draw and pray can make the process seem more like prayer—rather than just another steep step on the computer learning ladder and an exercise in frustration. Experiment with the ready-made shapes; **you can stretch, shrink, rotate, or distort** them. Fill in shapes with color or background patterns. Change the way a line looks by making it dashed or thicker. The program I use also has single- and double-ended arrows. Try the function that allows you to draw freehand or scribble. It takes some practice, but it feels more like drawing than clicking the mouse does.

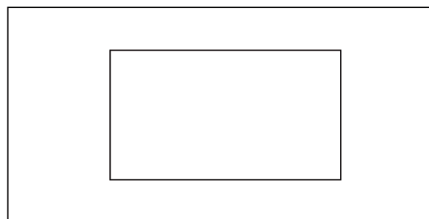
The next section will walk you through a Praying in Color session on the computer. I have chosen the names, shapes, and colors for instructional simplicity. Feel free to make other selections. A first round of this might not feel much like praying. Over time, the drawing steps will become more automatic.


Start your prayer time using some of the suggestions on pages 22 and 23 in Chapter 2.

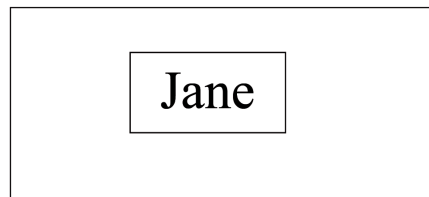
 Find the rectangle icon. Click on it. Move it to the location on the page where you want it to be. Make it the size you want it to be.




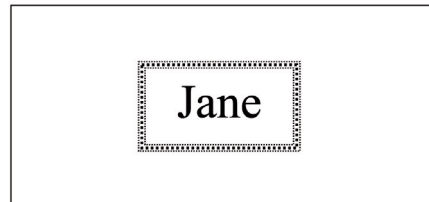
 Click on the rectangle. Select the textbox icon. The textbox will be inside of the rectangle. If not, move it inside of the rectangle. Change it to the desired size.



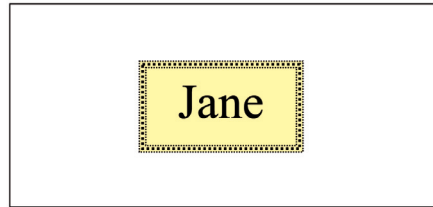
 Click inside the textbox. Write the name of the person for whom you want to pray. Change the font, color, size, and position of the name. Choose a color or style of font that reminds you of the person. Or choose a color and font that will bring you joy or will keep your attention. Readjust the size of the textbox.



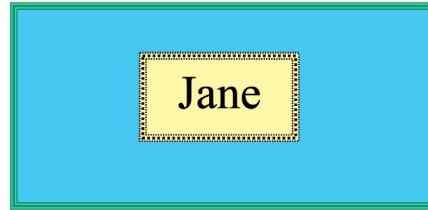
 Click on the textbox and change the intensity and style of the outline. You can also change the color.



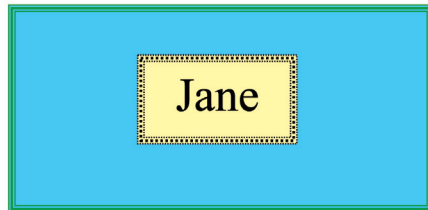
- Click inside of the textbox and change the background or fill color.



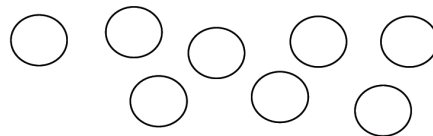
- Click on the rectangle and change the border style and intensity. Change the background or fill color.



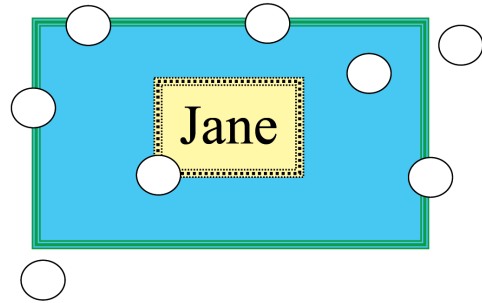
- ▴ Size the rectangle again, if desired. Use the icon or command that connects objects together. My program uses the word "Group." Group the textbox and the shape. This means: hold the shift button down, click on the rectangle and the text box, then hit the word "Group." This action enables you to pick up the whole design and move it to some other place on the page. It also makes copying and pasting easier.



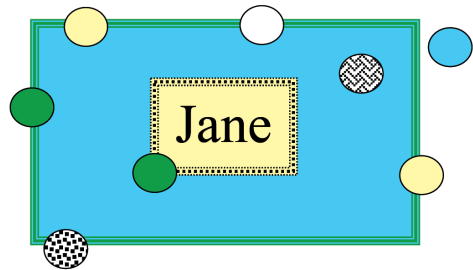
- Add other shapes to enhance the drawing and to spend more time in prayer for the person. For example, choose a circle. Copy the circle. Hit the paste button as many times as the number of circles you want.



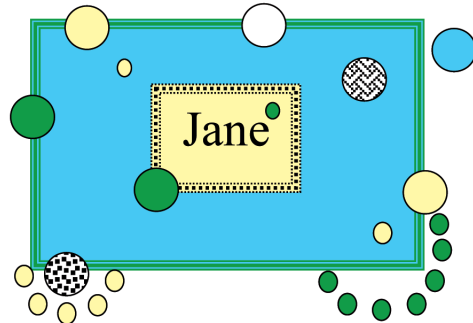
Move the circles to different places on or near the drawing. Think of each click of the mouse as a prayer moment—kind of a divine ditto to say that the person is in God’s hands.



Resize the circles and add fill color and patterns. When you are satisfied with this step, group all of the pieces together.



Add another round of circles of varying sizes. Group all of the pieces of the drawing together.

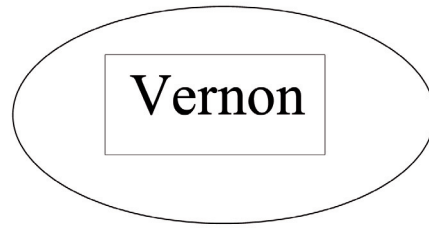


This may sound corny, but to me Jane seems less alone, surrounded by color and shape. The time we spend with her matters. It changes how we see her and how we see God. And our faith tells us that it changes Jane and us, as well.

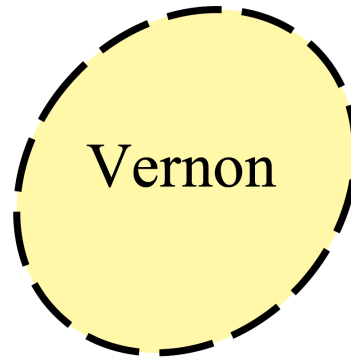
Use some of the suggestions on page 30 to conclude your time with Jane and to move on to prayers for another person. The fact that you can still see “Jane” on the page will keep her in your continual prayers.



● Add another person to your prayer drawing. This time choose the oval shape. Change the size and shape. Add the textbox and name.

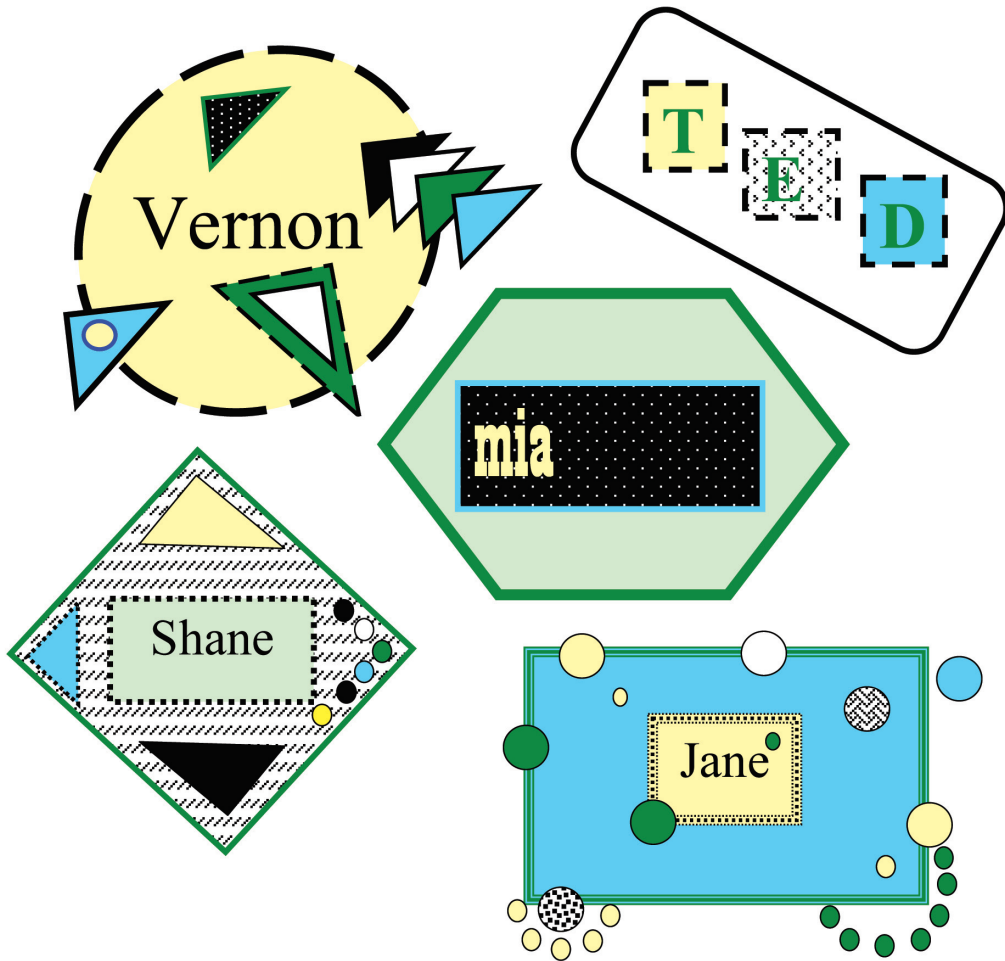


● For a little variation, click on the oval and rotate it. Click on the textbox and fill it with color. Change the color and style of border of the textbox or remove the border. Click on the oval and fill it with the same color as the textbox. Change the border of the oval. Group the textbox and oval together.



▲ Resize the grouped oval. Add additional detail and enhancement to the original shape. Group all of the shapes together.





△ Create new shapes and designs with other names. When you have finished your prayer drawing, you can rearrange the individual shapes on the page to create your final icon.

● Now you are ready to re-visit the

people on your prayer icon with visual or verbal prayers. Print out your drawing, save it, or send it to others. The more you become familiar with the drawing program that you use, the more prayerful the experience will be.