

ELEMENT

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DISPATCH



MEET OUR NEWEST ELDER
& A CLOSER LOOK AT VAFB



ISSUE #2



**FEATURED
STORY**

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ISSUE #2

Element exists to bring Glory to God. In that, we will do our best to care for whom the Scriptures calls, “The least of these.” We exist to live out the Gospel and do as it commands in Matthew: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*”

E

1

F P

2

T O Z

3

L P E D

4

P E C F D

5

E D F C Z P

6

L E F O D P C T

7

F D P L T C E O

8

Jesus is the big E on the eye chart. As we look at His life, we see He was here to carry out a mission: the epic rescue of an undeserving people for the glory of God.

As we see from studying Genesis, God created man in His image and we witness the first glimpse of what we were created for--relationship with God and with other human beings. However, as Genesis also reveals, our ability to be in those relationships as God calls us to has been muddled by our own self-seeking attitudes.

While it is only normal to hear people complain that, “Church {service} just didn’t do anything for me, today,” or, “I don’t like the music” it came as a surprise to hear people complain about how Element is growing, or how we focus so much on Gospel Community and living on mission.

Not to focus on those ideas, though, is to commit our Christian community to a state of shallowness. Bill Clem, author of the book *Disciple*, writes:

FOR
GOD’S
GLORY

“A community will not remain shallow if its overarching objective is to integrate new people. There is no conflict between authentic community and mission. The people of God involved in one another’s lives and working redemptively in the lives of outsiders is the essence of biblical community and biblical mission.”

And that is what Element is here for: to send people out into the world in which God has put us. To live for Him at work, school, in our neighborhoods, at home. Just as the moon reflects the sun’s light, so we are to reflect God’s light and love to the world around us. We see in the Trinity that the Father sends the Son, and the Father and Son send the Spirit. As such, this relationship dynamic affects Element’s church structure. We have elders whose job it is to equip and train the deacons, who are to equip and train the members, who are to go and live out the Gospel in their daily lives, effectively, to be the church outside of Element’s walls. That essence of biblical community and mission is found when we seek to make Disciples who then go on to make more Disciples.

For this reason, we take Eldership very seriously. At the beginning of this year, we welcomed Jonathan Whitaker as our newest elder. Many of you may not know him, so we wanted to take this issue of *Dispatch* to and introduce you to him, his family and where he sees Element going. Like many at Element, Jonathan is on active duty at Vandenberg Air Force Base, which is the largest employer on the Central Coast. Take some time to read through this issue to catch a glimpse of the Whitakers (and their Gospel Community’s) mission to reach out to those who come through VAFB for work or schooling.

Michael Reed

DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES



CALLING ALL SOLO SAPIENS

By Eric Djafroodi
Elder of Equipping and Discipleship

Have you ever talked to someone with a really thick accent? If you pay attention, you'll notice patterns of pronunciation. For example, many native Spanish speakers pronounce the letter "V" like the letter "B." That's how it is in Spanish. They can't help it. When they see a "V" in English it sounds like a "B" in their minds. This has become the only way for them to see it.

We are all shaped by our experiences and culture to view things a certain way, and it's very difficult for us to see things differently. This is true with how we view our lives, our relationships and society as a whole. For those of us raised in America after WWII, our lives have been shaped by the values of individualism. We see our individual goals and rights as more important than those of the community of which we are a part. Individualism promotes a way of life in which the individual is supreme and sovereign over everything. Its values compared to

its counterpart look like this:

- Think of Myself over Think of Others (If I don't, who will?)
- Lawsuits over Reconciliation
- Individual Rights over Community Responsibilities
- Career Advancement over Company Loyalty
- Cynicism over Trust (You can't trust those you don't know!)
- Relative Truth over Absolute Truth (truth is defined by and for each individual)

John Locke, chairman of the Department of Human Communication Sciences at the University of Sheffield in England labels this western condition as **atomization—people drifting away from each other.** It has been noted that societies prior to the mid-nineteenth century don't even have a word for individualism, which we have coined for our own use, because in their time there was no individual who did not belong to a group and who could

be considered absolutely alone. In the words of John Locke, we have become solo sapiens.

This has become a national epidemic documented by sociologists and pollsters. According to studies done by George Gallup Jr., Americans are among the loneliest people in the world. We are living the American dream, or so it appears. But if you look deeply enough, most of us would have to admit that there is a sense of isolation and powerlessness—a feeling of discontent. We can buy so much activity and entertainment—how can we be so lonely? Busy two income couples trying to make a living are just spent after long hours at work, all the children's activities, homework, sports, yard work, etc. Urban housing developments designed for commuters and modern technology create an environment where we never have to rely on or connect with anyone. We are connected to our individual homesteads through a closed in automobile. Gallup refers to this American isolation by saying that **"We are physically detached from each other."** We change places of residence frequently. One survey revealed that seven in ten do not know their neighbors. As many as one-third of Americans admit to frequent periods of loneliness, which is a key factor in the high suicide rate among the elderly. The isolation that so many feel today can be like solitary confinement in the midst of a society of inmates, and unfortunately the Church is often part of the prison system.

I hope it is obvious that the values of individualism contradict God's design

and desire for His people. But who would deny that this individualist mind-set is brought into the Church today? Our "small groups" today, by and large, fall short of the authentic community that we are created for and have become places in which individuals focus on themselves in the presence of others. The common attitude is: Come if you have time, talk if you feel like it, respect everyone's opinion, never criticize, and leave quietly if you become dissatisfied. There is no real sense of commitment or belonging, and all of these factors work against the growth of true community.

Our Lord Jesus taught that we shouldn't be self-seeking because our lives are ultimately in God's hands and we can trust Him to meet our every need. We see in Matthew 6:25-33 that we don't have to be anxious about food or clothing or shelter. He assures us of our individual value to our heavenly father, and calls us instead to earnestly seek the things that God cares about—His righteous reign being spread in the hearts of lost and broken people throughout the world. And as more individuals become part of God's kingdom, His church will grow not only in numbers, but in oneness—as a special community formed by and for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This common biblical purpose of mission/discipleship is a prerequisite if we hope to experience true community as God intended.

The apostle Paul made it clear that because of God's grace towards us we must view the community of believers above ourselves as individuals. He wrote in **Philippians 2:2-4** **"Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same**

love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Biblical community as described here requires not only a common biblical purpose, but also a common space (time and places) that facilitates the chemistry needed for effective community. Some of the common characteristics that define this space are:

Spontaneity – where activities and gathering take place spontaneously, without great planning or outside force.

Availability – where people are ready, willing and eager to lend an ear or a hand, or just offer the gift of their presence. Being available to others is a priority that makes spontaneity possible.

Frequency – simply spending a good deal of time together. This differs from the weekly event-based mentality and looks for opportunities to share life together.

Common meals – sharing common meals together has become foreign in American culture. This was the biblical practice of the early church and will be found wherever authentic community exists.

Geography – while distance has become less of a problem in our day, close proximity still makes a significant difference in fostering the previous four characteristics

When one of these is missing, something essential is lost. If all of them are missing, it's safe to say that real community is most likely not happening.

At Element we are continually calling all Solo Sapiens to see what life looks like lived God's way. We call it Gospel Community and it is where church really happens. It is where groups of people decide to live shared lives for the common purpose of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, making disciples, growing as

disciples, and caring for and serving one another as family. It is difficult for most of us in our culture to see our lives lived in this way. We must remember that we were created for community as God made clear from the beginning when He said that it is not good for the man to be alone. It is our hope that everyone who calls Jesus Lord will experience true Gospel Community as members of the body of Christ. Doing so is a major way in which God's kingdom will come and His will will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.



Genesis



Watch online now



Meet Our Newest Elder

story by Manette Shaver

eld·er

An influential member of a tribe or community. In Native American society, an Elder is highly regarded and respected. They are frequently the older men of the tribe, but not always. Most importantly, they must be considered to have significant wisdom in areas of tradition, able to transmit this knowledge to their tribe or nation, and committed to caring for their people.

Likewise, in Christianity, an Elder is a person valued for his wisdom and for his knowledge of God's word. An Elder is also a person who cares for the people of the church. At Element, Elder and Pastor are synonymous with one another--our Elders are our Pastors. In Acts 20:28, Paul

speaks directly to the elders of the church and says, *"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with His own blood."*



Lauren, Jennifer, Jonathan, Holly

At Element, our qualifications for Eldership are derived from Scripture. For instance, we adhere to the 17 qualifications defined by Paul in 1 Timothy 3: A man who is mature in his faith and is above reproach. He should be able to teach. He should be a husband of only one wife who manages his household well and has obedient children. He should have good temperament, self control, not given to drunkenness, not a lover of money, respectable, hospitable, not violent, gentle, not contentious, and has a good reputation with non-Christians.

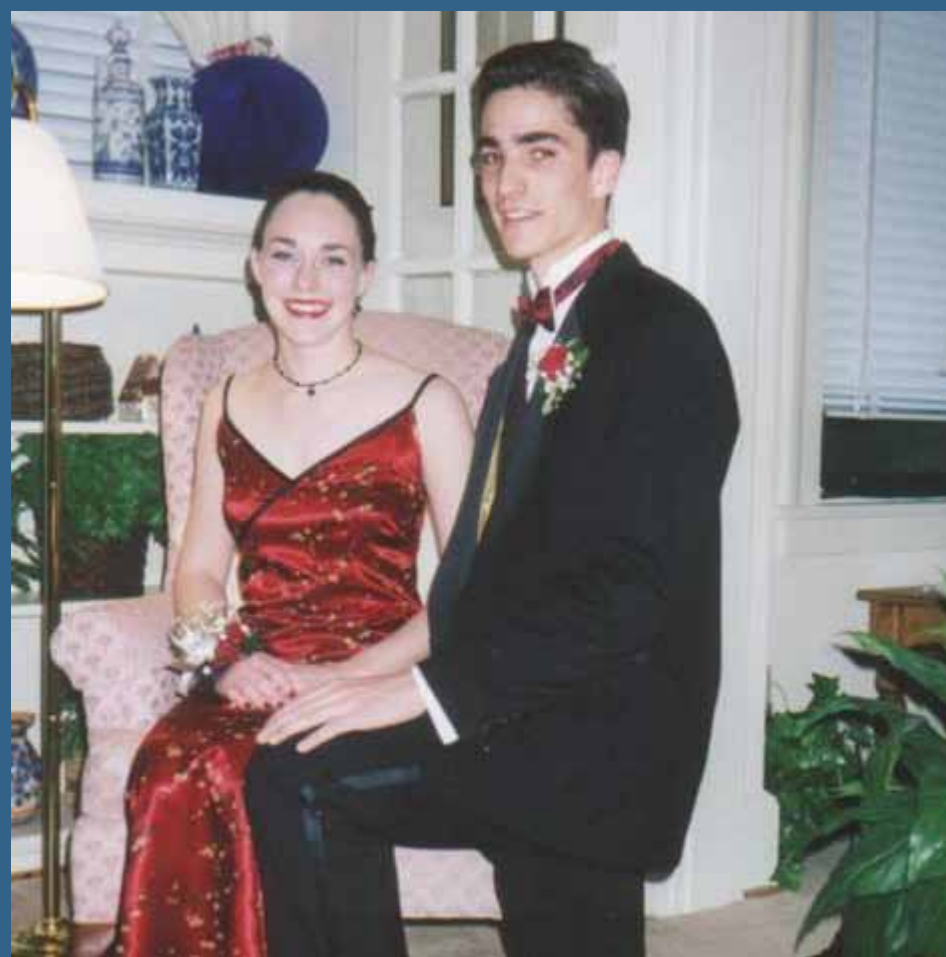
During this time last year, one of our founding elders was called to move to Billings,

Montana. After much prayer and consideration, Aaron Carlberg (Lead Pastor) and Eric Djafroodi (Pastor of Equipping and Discipleship) appointed Jonathan Whitaker as the Elder of Member Care in early 2012. In accordance with 1 Timothy 3, the above 17 criteria were thoroughly examined and witnessed in Jonathan's life... serving as confirmation of Aaron and Eric's decision.

For instance, Aaron and Eric observed Jonathan for nearly a year. They examined his commitment to his wife, children, and Element. Over time, they saw that his wife, Jennifer, always spoke of him with respect as a husband, father, and

leader in their home. They witnessed his great temperament, and how he never became unduly upset or overreacted to situations. His understanding of the Gospel as truth, of the person and work of Christ, the nature of man, and the joy that God imparts to His people was clear and evident. Most importantly, they found that Jonathan understood that we are to be about God's glory and not our own. Jonathan's focus was and is Christ-centered.

Jonathan came to know the Lord at the young age of 11. He was born into a God-fearing family that loved and served the Lord, and continues to do so today. In fact, the book he uses to read Bible stories to his girls, Lauren and Holly, is the same book his mother read to him and his brother--a book given to her by her father. Faith in God was something that had been ingrained in him since birth, but as he got older and progressed through his teenage years, Jonathan pulled away from the church and from God. He graduated high school, went off to college, and even got married without giving it a second thought. While he did not doubt his faith in God, he was not growing in Christ, nor was he seeking a close, intimate relationship with Christ. It wasn't until he and Jennifer found out they were pregnant with their oldest daughter, Lauren, that they mutually decided to actively pursue spiritual growth. They had decided that Lauren would be born into a family in which God was the center.



As they began exploring their faith, they became completely aware that their lives did not resemble that of their Savior. Together, they began seeking oneness with God daily. As soon as they decided to align their lives with Christ, God began blessing the commitment they made, as He continues to do today. In fact, when asked about the type of leader Jonathan is at home, Jennifer said, "We memorize scripture together, and we pray together. When I'm screwed into the ceiling about something, he has a way of calming my spirit and bringing it back to what God wants for our family and our life. He challenges me when I need to be challenged, and loves me when I need to be loved."



Space Operations Officer

The Whitakers were brought here to Santa Maria for work. Jonathan is a Space Operations Officer in the Air Force. He is currently a Captain and is anticipating a promotion to Major this year. What is a Space Operations Officer, anyway? In lay-men's terms, he tracks and catalogs space objects for a living.

For him, joining the Air Force and serving our great nation was a logical choice. After all, he is 3rd generation Air Force. The

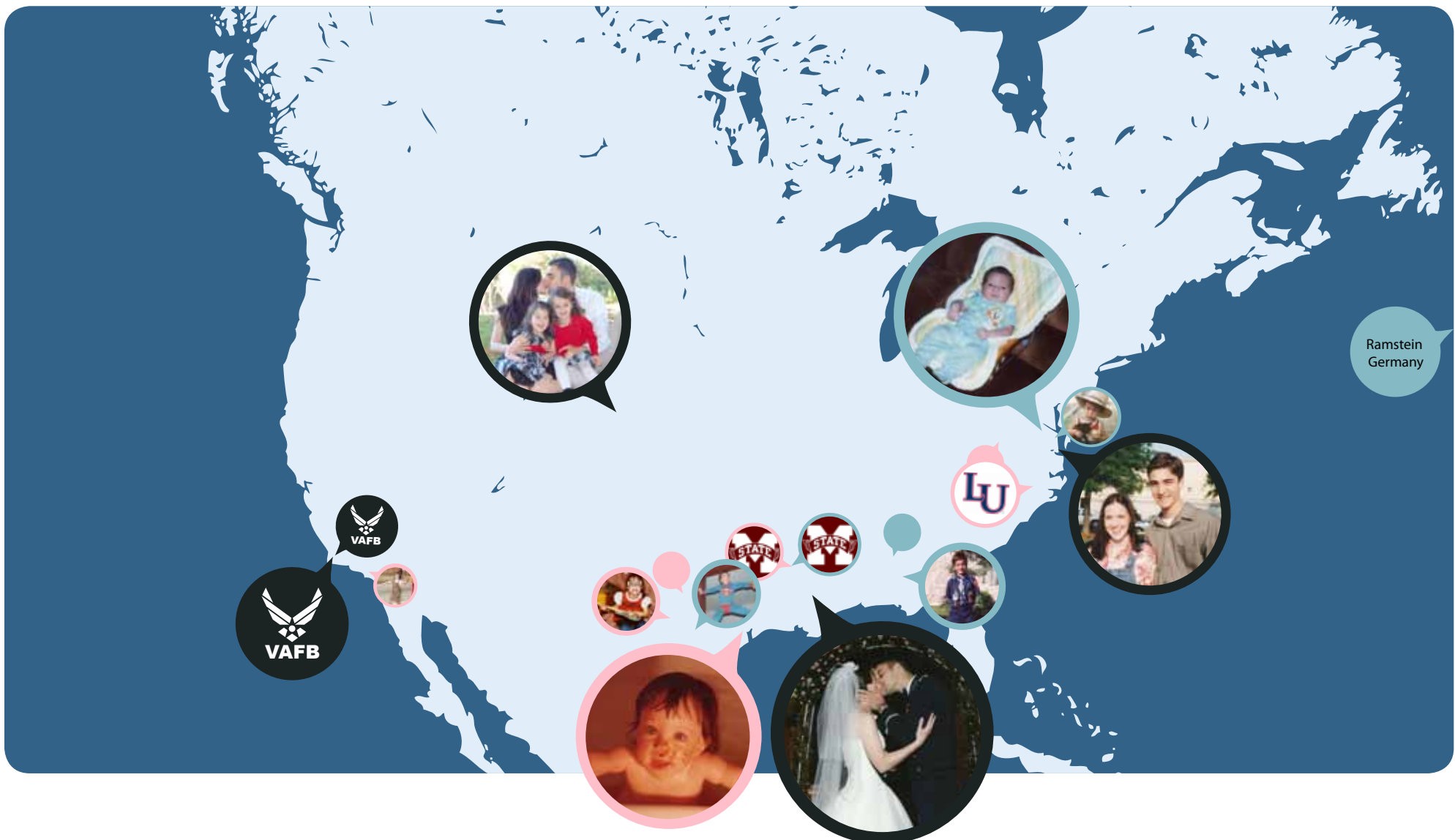
Air Force and the lifestyle that comes with it is all he knows. He has lived all over the United States, and has even spent a few years in Germany. The Air Force was appealing to him for other reasons as well. As he describes, " (it) is a lifestyle reminiscent of a day when more Americans valued patriotism, sense of duty to your fellow man, and a value for more conservative ideals; a 50's snapshot of Americana, if you will."

If you are keeping track, you will have noticed that Jonathan wears many hats; he is a husband, a father to two beautiful girls, a Captain in the Air Force, and now an Elder here at Element. How does a person balance all these things in day-to-day life? This is something that both

Jonathan and Jennifer considered when given the opportunity to add Elder to Jonathan's list of responsibilities. Jonathan says, "Each separate role directly complements all of the other roles in life." For instance, his relationship with Christ challenges him to be a better husband. His role as a Godly husband necessitates that he is a better father and spiritual leader within the home. His role as child of God, husband, and father, along with the skills taught to him by the military, makes him a better officer and leader in his

Jennifer echoed this same sentiment. Admittedly, she was initially fearful that the role of Elder would mean sacrificing their valuable family time. However, she has been blessed in watching Jonathan take on this role. She is confident as things continue to unfold, saying, “We will see more and more great things that God wants to do through Jonathan.”

γ has taken them...



How will Jonathan being in the Air Force will affect his Eldership? At this point, the Whitakers have been at Vandenberg Air Force Base for a year and a half, and this assignment is meant to be a three year tour. While it does not necessarily mean they will move in another year and a half, it is likely that they will be moving, especially since he will be promoted in the near future. That being said, Jonathan has set goals with a sense of urgency as he forges ahead into Eldership.

His first goal is actually a charge that was given to him by Aaron and Eric: to disciple a replacement as preparation for his leave in the future. This task entails finding a man who loves God, has a heart for people, and who can take on the mantle of this job. He also wants to motivate the deacons in such a way that they are meeting the

true needs of Element's community. Additionally, Jonathan wants to leave a legacy of continuity. He went on to say how important it is to him that Element as a whole begins to be missional in everything we do, that we shed the mentality of "I go to church every Sunday" and embrace the "I am owned by Christ and this is how I live my life" mentality. Everything we say and do should be a reflection of our Savior for our neighbors, coworkers, and even strangers. Our daily life is our mission field. "We need to remember that being missional is not a choice, but a command given by our Savior." We couldn't agree more.

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:35

elder of member care

Oversees and guides areas that fulfill the span of care for members at Element. These ministries include, but are not limited to, men's ministry, women's ministry, and deacons. He works closely with the Elder of Equipping and Discipleship to move people toward Gospel Communities. In conjunction with the other elders he sets the spiritual direction for Element.





VAFB

At Element, we want to bless our city and see lives redeemed by the good news of Jesus. But our vision is bigger than the city of Santa Maria alone. We want to see the whole Central Coast changed by the power of the gospel. We want to see the gospel go out to “the ends of the earth.” So in this article we wanted to take the time to highlight our neighbors at Vandenberg Air Force Base and begin to look at ways that we can reach the folks at Vandenberg with the Gospel.

1,000

Department of
Defense civilians

8,000

retirees

8,000

Air Force assigned
personnel and
family members

3,700

contractors



Headquarters for the
30th Space Wing

Which manages
Department of Defense
space and missile testing,
and places satellites
into polar orbit.

11

miles to Lompoc,
the closest town

VAFB
(aka Vandyland)

98,000

acres the base
encompasses



Home of the
381st Training
Group

35

miles of pristine
Pacific Coastline

1/4

of the Active Military
population & their
families move to other
bases each year

1,000

students graduate
each year from over
100 different courses

90%

of the student population
moves to another base
each year

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES:

“The church exists by mission
as fire exists by burning.”

- Emil Brunner

Our great purpose as a church is to bring glory to God. We are all called to live missional lives – in which our words and actions, where our individual lives and our community life, all line up the same message of good news of Jesus Christ. The key question, then, is “how can we take this message to Vandenberg?” The base presents some great opportunities and some great challenges. You don’t have to look long or hard to see them.

For example, settling into a new home can be frustrating and lonely. Constantly pulling up roots can be wearying and unsettling. But imagine if new students at Vandenberg were welcomed into authentic communities who became their home away from home. Imagine if new believers were discipled, equipped, and strengthened, and then sent off as missionaries all around the world. Imagine if families were blessed by the welcome, hospitality, and love of the church (who is merely reflecting the welcome and love of Jesus) and in turn becomes that welcoming, hospitable, and loving family to others.

Raising a family in the military also presents unique challenges. When a dad or mom is deployed or separated for whatever reason, the spouse who remains behind effectively becomes

a single parent overnight. Life doesn’t stop – bills must still be paid, the car still needs to be fixed, and diapers still need to be changed. Imagine the impact that a group of Christians could have if they were committed to loving that family through thick and thin, regardless of whether they are believers or not. Mission means that we don’t just look after our own, but that we live like Jesus, the true Good Samaritan. Imagine the witness of a community who surrounds them, helping them practically, praying them through the separation, and encouraging them during times of anxiety. That kind of radical love can only be explained by the gospel.

Or think about how many students at Vandenberg are recently out of high school and college, and are still trying to find their place in the world. Imagine if our GCs were places where young men could learn from and be mentored by godly older men, where young women could learn from and be challenged by Godly older women. Imagine if they saw in our community that life lived under Christ’s rule is the good life, abundant life, regardless of the circumstances. Think of the witness we could have if we showed them how so many of the values that the military sets out (selfless service, servant leadership, living with purpose) are rooted and perfected in Jesus.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

What will it take to reach Vandenberg’s population?

“I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.”
1 Corinthians 9:22b-24.

It will take Gospel Communities (GCs) that are flexible enough to shift their schedules to accommodate the ever-changing student schedules. It will take people willing to cook home-made meals for relative strangers. It will take mature believers challenging, mentoring, and living as examples for younger men and women. It will take

GCs that are able to think outside the box. It will take people willing to do “cross-cultural” missions, who take the initiative to understand the military culture. It will take people who are not ashamed of the Gospel.

We don’t need perfect people or perfect communities: we need committed, authentic, gospel-centered communities who live by the power of the Spirit, love Jesus more than their comfort zones, and pray as if God were really sovereign. We need communities who will *“run that they may obtain the prize”* and *“share in its blessings with others.”*

WRITTEN BY WILL FLATHERS





PHOTO BY BRIAN TERRILL

LOOKING FORWARD

TELL US YOUR STORY.

Tell us what Jesus and Element mean to you.

www.ourelement.org/about/tell-us-your-story

IN THE NEXT ISSUE...
Tamar Center, Thailand

Questions or Ideas for DISPATCH?
Write us at: dispatch@ourelement.org



ELEMENT
christian church