

Manny Arango

foreword by SCOT MCKNIGHT

CRUSHING CHAOS



Calm Your Storms.
Order Your Life.
Find Your Peace.





CRUSHING CHAOS

*Calm Your Storms. Order
Your Life. Find Your Peace.*

Manny Arango

Foreword by Scot McKnight



Water Brook

This is a work of nonfiction. Some names and identifying details have been changed.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. (www.zondervan.com). The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica Inc.™ Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from the King James Version. Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. (www.lockman.org). Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author’s added emphasis.

Copyright © 2025 by Manny Arango Ministries, Inc.

Foreword by Scot McKnight copyright © 2025 by Penguin Random House LLC.

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for every reader. Please note that no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

All rights reserved. Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

WaterBrook and colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Hardback ISBN 978-0-593-60160-0

Ebook ISBN 978-0-593-60161-7

The Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the Library of Congress.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

waterbrookmultnomah.com

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ScoutAutomatedPrintCode

First Edition

Book design by Diane Hobbing

For details on special quantity discounts for bulk purchases, contact specialmarketscms@penguinrandomhouse.com.

This book is dedicated to Chaos and Order. To the chaos of my childhood—without you, I wouldn't be who I am today or have the requisite empathy to write this book.

And to my wife who has patiently waited and prayed as I've journeyed from Chaos to Order—this book is dedicated to you. Thank you for being my peace, constant and unmoving. I'm better because of you.

Foreword

There are good reasons to capture the cosmic problem with humans and the world order with the word *Chaos*, and not just because it derives from one of the Bible's first (and very cool) Hebrew terms. We are prone to dig our heels in with traditional and historical terms, like *sin* and *transgression* and even our *Adamic nature*. Chaos was tamed by God and reordered into the beauty of all creation flowing as designed by our Creator. The primordial problem with creation, then, was not sin against God but the presence of Chaos. It's the fundamental problem behind all fundamental problems.

Chaos is systemic in that it impacts all of creation, all our governmental systems, all our economic systems, all our (yes) church systems, and all our relationships. Chaos, then, is not something entirely subdued. It's the original problem that lurks in the corners like some goblin, waiting to rise into a presence that disrupts the good order of God. Nothing speaks systemic Chaos more than the oceans—dark, gloomy, mysterious, fathomless, filled with death. Only one can tame the ocean, and that is the Water Walker, Jesus, who reached out His hand to a sinking follower and then calmed the chaos above (storms) in order to calm the chaos below (the turbulent

x FOREWORD

waters).

Chaos is spiritual in that it distorts God's love into magical thinking, disrupts the flow of God's grace toward us into what must be earned, and disengages us from God, from ourselves, and from those we are to love. Chaos is spiritual because it transforms the gospel about Jesus Christ into a weapon that can be used to manipulate, control, and dominate. Chaos turns Christ into a weapon against the world rather than the revelation of God's grace and love and justice and beauty.

Chaos is personal because it invades our innermost selves, coercing us to think we are unworthy, unable, unwilling, undesirable, and ugly—but we are not. God loves us. Christ died for us. Christ was raised for us. Christ is coming back for us. The Spirit is with us, in us, for us, and empowering us. God has done all this for us because God wants our innermost selves to be redeemed, transformed, and empowered to love, to bring chaos into beauty, and to shift the conversations away from domination and violence toward goodness and justice and peace.

Chaos is personal because we are prone not only to wander, as the old hymn has it, but moreover to wander into the wild and the wilderness—where chaos rules, where order is not to be found, and where we can be “free” to live in the wild out of reach of God's Order.

Chaos is a story, one we cannot live and flourish in, but it has become a compelling story for too many today. Chaos whispers to us that we each can do our own thing, that “you be you, I'll be me, and we can get along.” Chaos knows that you are not you without us and that we cannot flourish on our own—that Walden is no place to live for those made to love one another. (I'm told Thoreau's mother did his laundry.)

Chaos takes us into the wilderness to ruin us, to weaken our need for love, and to diminish our yearnings for justice and peace. Chaos brings anxiety; God's ordering in Christ brings the true peace.

In this book, Manny Arango has given us the gift of a word, and by it, through it, and with it paves a new path through the disorders of our modern world, naming them for what they are—chaos—and taking us into the beauty of God's redemption and empowering presence. *Crushing Chaos* is courageous, creative, and compelling. The dragons of disorder can be ordered only when Chaos is crushed by the Lion who, paradoxically, doubles as the Lamb. Manny's book turns the whole Bible into a story of God taming Chaos, of God turning Chaos into Order, and of an ordered creation finding its best Order in Christ. Chaos then is scriptural, but Order is even more so.

Most of all, *Crushing Chaos* names what ails, disrupts, ruins, wounds, crushes, divides, and deconstructs us. At one time, long ago when I was a college student, a professional asked what had become of *sin*. People liked the title of his book,¹ but America was not ready to embrace the truth: Sin was real. Manny is asking the same question with the primordial word and the primordial problem, with the word *Chaos*. He's also proposing the primordial redemption: Order. Ordering is God's work, and it is not as simplistic as creating "out of nothing." Ordering turns chaos into beauty and darkness into light; ordering turns empty seas into waters teeming with fish, empty skies into skies filled with birds, and open spaces into communities populated by those energized by God's image to care for this world and the persons in it. Ordering then is the flip side of Chaos. If Chaos is the systemic, spiritual, and personal problem we face today, the solution is not government control;

xii FOREWORD

it is not one man running the world. It is God ordering it and God's created images sub-ordering what God is ordering.

Ordering sees this world as God's temple—as an earth shaped by God for you and me to bring the fruits of our labor into order as a way of worshipping God and loving one another. Creation's true Order is a person, Jesus Christ, who crushed Chaos on the cross and who rose to establish an Order based on grace, love, justice, and peace. No word captures our world better than *Chaos*, and the only solution to it is God's true, lasting, and flourishing Order.

—*Scot McKnight*

Professor in search of God's Order

Contents

<i>Foreword by</i> Scot McKnight	00
---	----

SECTION 1: A WORLD OF CHAOS

<i>Chapter 1:</i> Panic in the Lobby	00
<i>Chapter 2:</i> Peace in the Temple	00
<i>Chapter 3:</i> Monsters in the Bible	00
<i>Chapter 4:</i> A Dragon in the Garden	00
<i>Chapter 5:</i> Rolling in the Deep	00
<i>Chapter 6:</i> Drowning in the Darkness	00
<i>Chapter 7:</i> Adapting to the Desert	00

SECTION 2: TAMING THE BEAST

<i>Chapter 8:</i> You Son of a Beast	00
<i>Chapter 9:</i> Hagar and Her Wild Ass	00
<i>Chapter 10:</i> A Ladder in Luz	00
<i>Chapter 11:</i> Limping with Laban	00
<i>Chapter 12:</i> Caged but Not a Beast	00
<i>Chapter 13:</i> Pierced Ears and Empty Stomachs	00

SECTION 3: COME HELL OR HIGH WATER

<i>Chapter 14: When God Leaves the Group Chat</i>	00
<i>Chapter 15: The Context of Chaos</i>	00
<i>Chapter 16: Noah's Temple</i>	00
<i>Chapter 17: Passive Wrath and Active Grace</i>	00
<i>Chapter 18: Moses and His Dragon</i>	00
<i>Chapter 19: Plagues of Chaos</i>	00
<i>Chapter 20: A Portal Back to Eden</i>	00

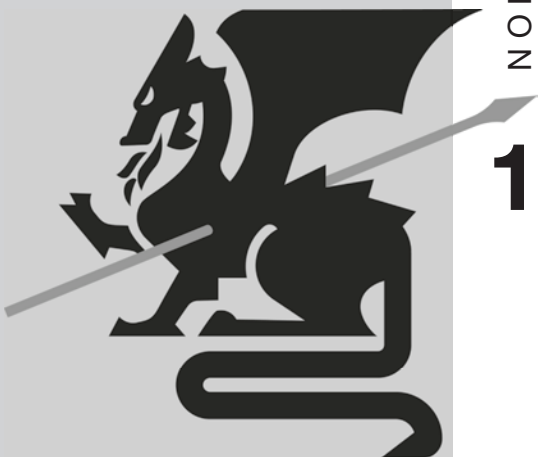
SECTION 4: THE PRINCE OF PEACE

<i>Chapter 21: Breaking the Cycle of Chaos</i>	00
<i>Chapter 22: Plunder the Dragon</i>	00
<i>Chapter 23: The Tempter and the Tempest</i>	00
<i>Chapter 24: One Small Step for Man</i>	00
<i>Chapter 25: Pregnant with a Prophet</i>	00
<i>Chapter 26: The Genesis of Jesus</i>	00
<i>Chapter 27: The Jesus That John Knew</i>	00
<i>Chapter 28: The Jesus Judas Thought He Knew</i>	00
<i>Chapter 29: The Chaos Crusher</i>	00
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	00
<i>Notes</i>	00

**A
WORLD
OF
CHAOS**

SECTION

1



Chapter 1

Panic in the Lobby

Now the earth was formless and empty,
darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of God was hovering over the
waters.

– GENESIS 1:2

The main emphasis [of creation] is not on a
process from nothing to something, from
nonexistence to existence, but on a process
from confusion to distinction, *from chaos to
order*.

– JAMES BARR, “WAS EVERYTHING THAT GOD CREATED
REALLY GOOD?,” EMPHASIS ADDED

Anxiety coiled itself around a young girl while she was standing in our church lobby on a Wednesday night. Minutes before our weekly worship service, she was fighting to breathe and relentlessly wiping tears from her face. I offered up prayers, seemingly in vain. My job was to protect and love these young people, but I felt powerless over the chaos of panic that had engulfed her.

Eventually her wave of anxiety subsided, but I never forgot

4 A WORLD OF CHAOS

this moment. I had preached dozens of messages about anxiety and panic. We had devoted prayer and ministry time specifically focusing on anxiety, but clearly, we hadn't cracked the code on the path to peace. After months of reflecting on this moment, I remembered that the creation account in Genesis has a whole lot to say about Chaos and that it describes the original state of creation as a deep, wild, raging ocean of Chaos. The opening words of the Bible declare:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Genesis 1:1–2)

God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was “formless and empty.” In Hebrew, those terms are *tohu*¹ and *va-vohu*,² which translate into English as “wasteness . . . that which is wasted, laid waste . . . a desert . . . emptiness, vanity . . . nothing”³ and “emptiness, voidness,”⁴ respectively. Other translations are “place of chaos,” “wilderness,” and “barren.”⁵ And the Hebrew term *tehom* (“deep”) can be translated as “abyss.”⁶ (We'll look at these terms in more detail in later chapters.)

Simply put, Scripture's first words declare that creation was a chaotic, untamed mess and that the Spirit of the Lord God was brooding over the surface of this barren, unintelligible, chaotic ocean abyss. Pretty epic visual, if you ask me. However, God didn't bring peace to this chaos. God began organizing the creation and moved the earth from chaos into *order*. God began to separate, pull apart, gather, and bring structure to the chaos of creation. Look at this description in Genesis 1:6–7:

God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it.

What did God do? *God separated.*

Read this next description in verse 9:

God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear."

What did God do? *God gathered.*

The beginning of creation reveals a God who knows how to rearrange, organize, unclutter, clean, uncomplicate, simplify, and structure life. God's solution for the Chaos found in Genesis wasn't to bring *peace*; it was to establish *Order*. Ironically, peace is always a natural by-product once Order takes root in the cosmos, and I have discovered that God's strategy for responding to Chaos hasn't changed.

Order was the missing key in our ministry approach, as anxiety was simply a result or by-product of chaos. I had spent all my time focused on the check engine light of anxiety instead of popping open the hood and actually checking the engine. Anxiety is just a symptom of the real, undiagnosed chaos living deep within us. I had been preaching about peace, essentially medicating pain and providing temporary quick fixes, instead of addressing the root of the problem. The good news is that there's a cure for Chaos, and my discovery of that cure is what this book is all about. The cure for Chaos is *Order*.

There's an Order to life that's revealed in the Scriptures.

Take sex for example. The Bible's vision: Sex goes *after* marriage, not before. Confusing this sequence will inevitably cre-

6 A WORLD OF CHAOS

ate chaos.

Unnecessary heartbreak.
Soul ties with multiple individuals.
Insecurity. Possessive behavior.
Children born outside of wedlock.
Baby-mama drama. Child support.

This is absolute chaos.

And it creates abundant opportunities for anxiety to thrive. It doesn't matter how much we pray for peace—peace will never be permanent in the soul of the person who rejects God's order.

Our families, churches, and institutions can flourish only when they are well ordered. God's order for families involves mothers *and* fathers who are present, engaged, and invested in the flourishing of their children. Mothers *and* fathers who exercise healthy authority over their children to guide, teach, and protect them. When this order is ignored or rejected, chaos ensues. Allow me to give an example around fatherhood.

According to a 2022 United States Census Bureau report, about one in five children are currently growing up without a father in the home,⁷ and the negative results speak for themselves. Removing the father from the head of the home creates chaos within society.

“Research suggests that fatherlessness is a significant contributor to mental health issues in children . . . and 71% of all children who abuse substances come from fatherless homes. . . . Another study found that 75% of adolescent patients in substance abuse centers are from fatherless homes.”⁸

In addition, “63% of youth suicides . . . and 85% of children who exhibit behavioral disorders” come from homes without fathers present.⁹ Fatherlessness not only affects mental health but also impacts financial outcomes, educational outcomes, and criminal activity.

Fatherlessness is directly linked to anxiety, depression, suicide, poverty, incarceration, and a host of other challenges.¹⁰ The facts paint a clear picture: When humanity deviates from God’s order, chaos always results. God’s order includes a healthy, present, invested father. A good dad defends his children from the chaos of society. Wherever there’s fatherlessness, there will also be chaos.

My dad was incarcerated for eighteen years and battled a drug addiction for decades. I grew up in a chaotic home, within the wider culture of a chaotic neighborhood, and I bucked against the order of male authority figures my entire teenage life. I hated the idea of order and submitting to my father’s authority because it was so foreign to the way I grew up, but then I realized I’d never actually mature if I didn’t embrace Order and reject Chaos. It didn’t matter how many earnest prayers I offered to God, desperately asking Him for peace; until I embraced His Order, I continued to struggle with depression and suicidal thoughts because my depression was being fueled by the fatherless chaos I was raised in. Depression was simply a symptom of a chaotic life that lacked the foundation, structure, and identity that fathers are designed by God to provide.

Order extends way past sequence and authority. The Bible outlines a rhythm for life. We’re designed to work for six days and rest for one day. Chick-fil-A style. Closed on Sundays. Yahweh commanded the people of Israel in the Old Testament

8 A WORLD OF CHAOS

to allow their land to rest every seven years—no crops, no planting, no harvesting. Modern scientists have proven that this practice of allowing the soil to rest has incredible health outcomes for humans and the environment. Genesis teaches that you and I were made from the dirt of the ground, and we also require rest if we're going to experience optimal fruitfulness. Adam was created from the dirt, which in Hebrew is called *adamah*.¹¹ Adam's name literally means "dirt man."

Jesus teaches that the seed of God's Word should be planted in the soil of our hearts (Matthew 13:23). Paul teaches that the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control should be growing from the soil of our very beings (Galatians 5:22–23). The Bible acknowledges that we are soil (Genesis 2:7). We are dirt, not metal. However, in the Chaos of our modern world, we have become machines—cranking out projects and grinding and being productive. Maybe many of us are anxious and living chaotic lives because there's no rhythm to our work. Both machines and farms produce. But those processes of production look radically different. Embracing Sabbath doesn't mean that we produce less; it means that we produce differently. Sabbath is a rhythm, and rhythm is a nonnegotiable element of God's Order.

Sequence. Authority. Rhythm.

I wonder how many of us have been praying for peace but are sabotaging our ability to receive, produce, or sustain peace because our lives reject God's sequence, authority, and rhythm. I wonder how many of us have rebuked anxiety but have yet to reject the forms of chaos that produce anxiety in our lives. The Bible provides a path out of Chaos, but it requires that we recover an ancient way of reading the Scriptures.

Modern interpretations of the creation account in Genesis focus so heavily on the fact that God created *ex nihilo*, or “out of nothing,” that we miss what ancient audiences would’ve emphasized and appreciated most about the biblical text. The authors of the Bible and their audiences assumed that Yahweh created everything out of nothing. That conclusion wasn’t their dominant point of emphasis.

Genesis 1:1 communicates this straightaway: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Think of this verse as the summary of the entire creation narrative, ten words that uphold the idea that God created everything out of nothing. However, once the text starts detailing the process of how this Creator brought everything into existence, the emphasis shifts. The writer of Genesis starts to describe a chaotic primeval ocean, not a blank canvas of nothingness.

Once verse 2 begins, the starting point for creation is no longer a blank slate of “nothing” but rather a deep and dark abyss of Chaos. And everything after verse 1 describes a sovereign Creator who masterfully rescues the creation from Chaos and establishes divine Order so that humans can flourish.

I hope we can recover this ancient emphasis. Because the same sovereign Creator who pulled creation out of the Chaos *then* wants to rescue our lives from Chaos *now*. The Bible provides a path from Chaos to Order, and as I began to discover that path for myself and teach it to others, I started seeing less and less anxiety.

This is why I stopped preaching about peace and anxiety. Instead, I rediscovered this way of reading and interpreting Genesis like an ancient person—seeing God as bringing Order out of Chaos. I returned to the ancient path, and I began preaching and teaching on Order and Chaos. I started teach-

10 A WORLD OF CHAOS

ing people how to properly order their lives, and somehow, we stopped having panic attacks in the lobby.

When we change our theology, everything else changes as a result. My dad has struggled with a drug addiction my entire life. As you can imagine, living with an addict is quite chaotic. But when I was somewhere around the age of twelve, my dad gave his life to Jesus and got baptized. From that moment on, he began to pray that God would miraculously deliver him from the chaos of addiction. I can vividly remember being twenty-two years old and my dad rejecting an opportunity to participate in a one-year Christian rehab program known as Teen Challenge.

Teen Challenge was offering my dad a process. Order. A daily routine. Community rules. A Bible memorization plan. Structure. A way to unravel the web of addiction he was trapped in.

I'll never forget my dad's words in that moment. He said, "I have faith for God to miraculously deliver me. I'm believing God for a miracle. I just need the right pastor to lay hands on me and the power of God will deliver me instantly."

My dad refused the process of discipleship because he wanted the instant power of deliverance. He wanted *ex nihilo* deliverance. He wanted his rescue to arrive "out of nothing" and God to wave a magic wand and conquer his chaos. And my dad's theology has kept him stuck in the chaos of addiction. I wonder if he would've made a different decision had he seen God as the Creator who carefully and steadily moved the cosmos out of Chaos and into Order in those opening days of Genesis. I couldn't convince him of the Chaos-crushing God of the Bible, but maybe I'll be able to convince you.

If there's chaos in your life, please rest assured: The God of

the Bible is neither intimidated nor stumped by it. He knows exactly how to conquer the chaos and create order in your life. And although He doesn't wave a magic wand over you to cure your anxiety instantly, He will lay out a path toward order so your anxiety begins to correct itself. God *can* bring peace into your life instantly and out of nothing. God *can* create freedom and sobriety for my dad instantly and ex nihilo. He *can*.

But there's a reason He tends not to. And that is what we will explore through the next couple of chapters.