

What is a “chaotic church”, really? Where are we headed?

I believe in the gathered church, whatever form that takes place (from house church to mega-church)  
I do believe that many times we have lost our way, but that simply means we have to find our way back.

As we talk about the tension between “structure vs. chaos” I am not really referring to anything new for 8:08. In many ways, I/we are simply recognizing how God birthed us, what God called us to be, and who God has called us to reach out to. I would also recognize that our core values, and core beliefs remain unchanged. This is not a thesis on how the structured church is bad, it is simply recognizing who God is calling us to be.

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Israel as a prototype of how society should work socially and spiritually

The Church as a prototype of how society should work socially and spiritually

## Lessons from the Book of Acts

### 1. “and the Lord added...” (Acts 2:43-47)

<sup>42</sup> All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper<sup>[i]</sup>), and to prayer.

<sup>43</sup> A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. <sup>44</sup> And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

<sup>45</sup> They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. <sup>46</sup> They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity<sup>[i]</sup>—<sup>47</sup> all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

### 2. As they were going to...Each day he was put... (Acts 3:1-6)

#### Acts 3

Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o’clock prayer service.

<sup>2</sup> As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. <sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money.

<sup>4</sup> Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, “Look at us!” <sup>5</sup> The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting some money. <sup>6</sup> But Peter said, “I don’t have any silver or gold for you. But I’ll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, <sup>[a]</sup> get up and <sup>[b]</sup> walk!”

**they had no 5 year plan  
they didn’t have an evangelism budget**

**they didn't have a worship team**  
**they didn't have a minister of healing**

**they simply did what they did and saw what God was doing and joined in.**

**3. The exciting things didn't happen on the Sunday meeting.**

**What we know is that we desire to be a church...**

- ...rooted in God's word
- ...driven by his love
- ...inspired by his grace
- ...clinging to his direction
- ...focused on his voice above all others
- ...committed to authentic community
- ...living life together in an honest way
- ...encouraging and caring for each other as brothers and sisters
- ...praying unceasingly
- ...reflecting good stewardship of everything God gives us
- ...unafraid to be uncomfortable when we are called out of our comforts
- ...challenging one another, while at the same time allowing the Holy Spirit to do the work and God to receive the glory (allowing people to be on different places on the journey doesn't mean that we don't care about or talk about sin, but it means that we challenge and guide each other out of love, relationship, and prayer, and let the Holy Spirit do the work...
- ...reaching out to those on the fringes and giving them a safe place to grow as we help to illuminate the path to Jesus
- ...letting Christ live through us in our everyday lives
- ...always asking how we can follow God more fully
- ...lending our time, our gifts, and our lives to the ministry taking place within the church, each of us doing our parts and sharing the burden
- ...embracing the chaos

**Chaos Theory: A Brief Introduction**

Chaos is not about pursuing “randomness.” Rather it is finding the core foundation and allowing everything else taking secondary roles in order of importance. It is allowing the “Spirit” to be wind and go where he wishes.

<b>Structure</b>	<b>Chaos</b>
Linear	Mosaic
Logic	Counter-Intuitive
Planted in rows	Wild Flower garden
People	Program
Event	Journey
What we do	Who we are
Artificial	Organic
Conventional Wisdom	Outside the box

Prompted	Spontaneous
Way of doing	Way of life
Organization	Organism
Business	Family
A structured church strives to have everything figured out, lined up, and appearing pristine...	...a chaotic church recognizes, and embraces its flaws as opportunities for discipleship and continual growth.
A structured church builds on methodology...	...a chaotic church builds on mindset.
A structured church can become an institution...focused on programs, projects, etc.	...a chaotic church can more easily take on the form of a family...focusing on human needs of those already in relationship.
A structured church often builds around a style, person, or type (seeker-sensitive, etc.)...	...a chaotic church is more difficult to pin down, making it easier to resist labels. Labels often define who belongs and who doesn't.
A structured church can more easily begin to rely on man's wisdom, asking "what do churches do in this situation?", or "what will people expect of us?"...	...a chaotic church is more free to ask the simple questions, like "what is God asking us to do at this crossroad?", or "what does the Bible really say about this?" as it clings not to traditional models or what has always been done, but merely to God's word, and his unique plan for this specific church community.

**HOW THIS MIGHT LOOK PRACTICALLY**

TEACHING:	structured - one person (a "professional") teaches for 45 minutes, everyone else simply receives.	chaotic - someone (often the pastor, sometimes not) teaches for awhile, and then there's time for others to chime in. God speaks not only to that designated person for that morning, but is actively speaking to others, who in sharing their perspective, help to broaden the impact of God's message to all of us. Thus, we sharpen each other.  The chaos is valuable because we sharpen each other and deepen community; it's difficult (uncomfortable sometimes?) because it requires more of all of us.
worship:	structured - a designated worship team leads us in a song set designed to bring us into worship through music.	chaotic - the worship team sets the tone and starts us off, with others feeling free to express their worship to God through songs, poetry, art, scripture reading, sharing testimonies, etc. (We used to do more of this, whether deliberately or not, and have gotten away from it.)  The chaos is valuable because it taps into our value that worship can take many forms and that God gifts us each differently; it's difficult (sometimes uncomfortable) because it pushes us out of our comfort zones and asks us each what God might be asking us to share with one another as we gather for corporate worship.

<p>Small groups: (we're doing this one fairly well at this point, or better than in the past)</p>	<p>structured - there is a set form and structure for what each group looks like and what happens in each group meeting. Leaders are trained according to a set program. (We sort of did this for awhile and burned the small groups out.)</p>	<p>chaotic - we recognize and encourage organized small groups, but leave the theme and function to be much more organic, taking different forms and filling different needs. Leaders are encouraged and disciplined (maybe we need to do this part better), but allowed the freedom to lead according to God's individual call.</p> <p>The chaos is valuable because it recognizes community and gives new people a place to plug in, but doesn't force community or require it to fit a mold. It's difficult (sometimes uncomfortable) because it isn't as organized as it could be.</p>
<p>Discipleship/mentoring/outreach/prayer/evangelism:</p>	<p>structured - each of these things has an organized team which leads and plans events and sets programs in place.</p>	<p>chaotic- we recognize how each of these things are happening naturally and organically, encouraging each other to disciple one another and those around us, reach out to our neighbors and friends who don't know Jesus, and pray together and individually for our loved ones and our community.</p> <p>The chaos is valuable because it puts the commissioning of each of these important parts of our spiritual lives into the hands of each member of the body, rather than allowing us to let the organized team take care of those things for us or limit our involvement in these things to those specific avenues. It's difficult (sometimes uncomfortable) for those same reasons.</p>
<p>Expectations of each other:</p>	<p>structured - we set requirements upon each other's spiritual lives, expecting one another to be at the same place as we are on the journey <b>(Goal is Uniformity)</b></p>	<p>chaotic - while we hold fast to Biblical truth and never compromise our values and beliefs, we set our primary objective as encouraging each other to know Christ better and more deeply and follow him more closely, through prayer, friendship, honest relationship, grace, and love. We walk along side each other, and out of relationship, we challenge each other to live lives of obedience, but recognize that ultimately it is only the Holy Spirit that can spur each of us to authentic change, repentance, and holiness. The focus is not on total agreement, rather it is on discovering together God's truth for us and embracing each other on our journey with Christ.</p> <p>(When we were a "young" church, it was easier to naturally go with the chaos, as we were all relatively immature and at chaotic points in our lives as a whole. This made it easier to embrace the people God brought to us who were at different points in their spiritual lives. As we mature and settle down in other areas of our lives, and mature in our faith it's easier to begin to expect those around us to be caught up, forgetting that God has each person on unique journey and is drawing them differently.)</p> <p><b>(Goal is Unity)</b></p>

<p>Relationship within our church community:</p>	<p>In a structured church, it's easier for community to be something that we "do", or that revolves around events and organized activities. While these things are good ways to begin to know each other, it might be easier to stop and an acquaintance level.</p>	<p>chaotic – we choose to <i>be</i> community/family, rather than just do things together. When we all serve each other, work for (not just with) each other and share with each other, a natural by product will be deeper relationships. This is the beauty of community and can make for a whole lot of growth in our lives. Close relationships bring the potential for incredibly deep and intimate relationships, and bring with it the potential for conflict and disagreement. It is at that point where we make the decision to walk away or work it out. A relationship built on commonalities allows for easy exit when enough commonalities no longer exist. Real community becomes more like a family, where we see our brothers and sisters as such, no matter of our differences. Walking away becomes much harder and is usually not considered. It is at this point where we choose to seek peace and reconciliation.</p>
<p>Relationship with outside community:</p>	<p>structured - we have everything neatly in place, which leads us to invite the community to come to us and see what we're doing</p>	<p>chaotic – we choose to venture into what's happening in the community, letting Christ live through us and draw people to see what God is doing in our lives, which may attract them to our church, but the ultimate goal is to draw them to the body of Christ in general.</p> <p>Chaos is valuable because it places the call on us to "go", rather than expecting others to "come". It's difficult because it pushes us.</p>
<p>Ministry:</p>	<p>structured – the majority of the burden falls upon the pastoral staff and ministry staff to care for the members of the body and keep things running smoothly</p>	<p>chaotic – the pastor(s) provides oversight, guidance, and leadership, but the ministry of the church relies on the whole body, caring for each other and walking through life together (our lay pastoral team fits in here)</p> <p>Chaos is valuable because it is less likely to burn out those who are feeling the burden of holding things together, and is more sustainable long term as more people are contributing to the needs of the community. It's difficult because it requires each person to do their part. Chaos also reduces unhealthy expectations placed on the Pastoral Staff.</p>