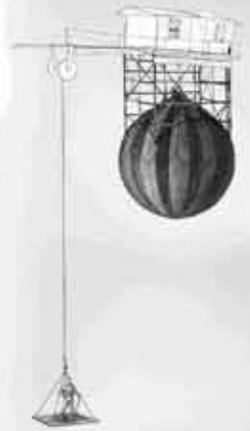


Some Assembly Required Gathering Tool

This resource is designed for groups that begin with a 10-15 minute large-group gathering before dividing into small groups. Show the Some Assembly Required series video and have an experienced communicator introduce the lesson using the illustration provided. Once your students move to their small groups, your small-group leaders should begin with the entry point section of the small group leader's guide.



Session One Gathering Tool

Illustration: Construction project

(Teacher's Note: Bring in a box of a toy or piece of furniture. Hold up the box for everyone to see, and as you do show the picture and talk about how great this product is. Then empty the contents of the box on the ground to reveal the pieces and instructions. You may then ask a student or two to come on stage and try to put together this item during your talk. If you do this, make sure that the item you brought cannot be put together during your meeting time.)

If it's not possible to buy an item to put together, you can use a picture of a house as the finished product and a stack of 2x4s as the some-assembly-required picture. If you do this, mark the contrast between what could be and what is.)

There are few worse feelings than the one that people get when they open a box like this. All your dreams of having this wonderful item fall apart as you realize that the sturdiness and dependability of the product depend squarely on your ability to put it together correctly. That's why, when we're shopping for a new desk or a new bookshelf or a new toy, we have learned to scan for the fine print for three dreaded words - "some assembly required."

Connecting the illustration: The words "some assembly required" may not be the worst words ever, but anyone who has tried to put together a toy or a piece of furniture with lots of pieces and elaborate instructions knows that these words can be really shocking. These words focus not on what is but on what could be. You have hopes and dreams of what the new purchase can bring to your life. But you had no idea that so much would be asked of you to make your purchase useful. So you open the box and realize that maybe you've bitten off more than you could chew. You have the pieces, the tools, and the instructions. What happens next is up to you.

Some Assembly Required is a series that recognizes that sometimes the best things in life come in pieces and that how we put the pieces together determines what we have in the end. So, we work, we read, we choose, and we construct. Sometimes, we must deconstruct and we start over. But in the end, we learn more in the process than we ever could have if the final product had just been handed to us, and we discover that some assembly required is not the threat we thought it was but actually part of the gift.

This is how a relationship with God often functions. It's easy to think that the Christian life is a one-stop shop purchased by one decision and a lot of grace. We want the finished product without the process. But the truth is that it rarely works this way. Rather, when we choose God, we don't get a life complete and free from struggle. Instead, God gives us a life with new potential, a set of instructions and a smile. He invites us into the process of putting it all together and works beside us as we do.

That's why we're doing this series. Over the next four sessions, we'll think about the places in our lives in between God's initiative and our prerogative. It's a collision of God's ability and our responsibility. It's a tale of how the Christian life is really lived.



Session Two Gathering Tool

Illustration: Stopping construction

Edith Macefield was a hero. She turned down one million dollars for her principles, and as a result gained national fame and respect. But Edith was a hero for a strange reason. This old woman became a hero by deciding not to move. Her little old house in Ballard, Washington, was in a neighborhood that was being torn down for a shopping center. But while everyone else sold their homes and moved, Edith decided she was going to stay. Even when developers offered her \$1 million for her home, she stayed in place. "I don't want to move. I don't need the money. Money doesn't mean anything," Edith once said. And the noise of construction didn't really faze her either: "I went through World War II. The noise doesn't bother me. They'll get it done someday." Eventually, developers built a huge shopping center around her house, and even after Edith's death at age 86, her home remained a testament to the fact that construction projects sometimes have to change.

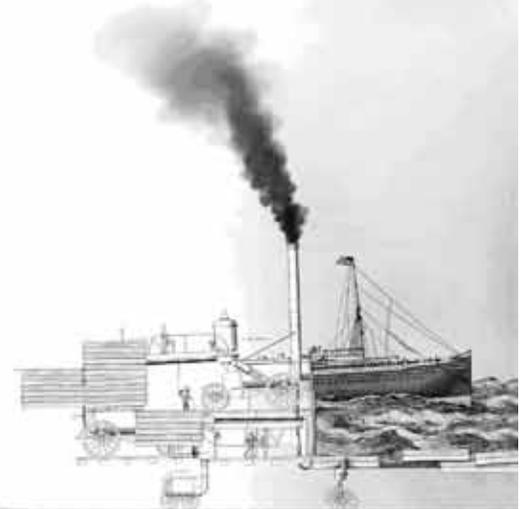
(Teacher's Note: Do an internet search for "Edith Macefield" to get pictures of Edith's house in the middle of a shopping center.)

Connecting the illustration: Edith provided a challenge for the Seattle-area construction project, and eventually her resolve caused developers to change their plans for progress. Her story reminds us that in a construction project, sometimes there comes a moment when construction stops and instruction takes place. The crew runs into a problem it can't solve, and it must learn new ways of doing things before progress can continue. As a result, the process of construction changes.

The same thing happens in our spiritual lives. In our first session of *Some Assembly Required*, we talked about the construction process and how we can experience progress in that area of our lives. But today, we come to another moment - the moment of instruction. These are the times when construction stops for a while because the process must change. When you stop to read the instructions, it feels like the construction process has slowed down or even stopped. But the truth is that pausing for instruction keeps the construction process moving in the right direction. Progress comes through process, and in these moments process trumps progress in the short term so that we can have maximum progress in the long run.

(Teacher's Note: If you began a construction project during your first session, go back to the pile of pieces and pull out the instruction manual. Hold it up for your students to give them a picture of why instruction is important.)

To experience this instruct moment, we're going to look again at the history of the temple in Jerusalem, and as we do we will find a moment in which a king sought to reassemble the temple to what God intended it to be. In this moment, construction paused so that instruction could happen. Let's see what we can learn from God's instruction.



Session Three Gathering Tool

Illustration: Collapse

(Teacher's Note: You can find a series of images of this building falling over by searching "strange building fell over Shanghai.")

In 2009, one of the strangest building accidents in history happened in Shanghai, China, where a 13-story building simply fell over. The Lotus Riverside complex had 11 residential buildings, but early one Saturday morning one of the buildings in the complex toppled over onto its side. The building was apparently well-constructed, because it stayed completely intact all the way to the ground. Instead of crumbling, it toppled over like a domino. Officials said that loose soil around an underground parking garage that was being excavated was to blame for the strange collapse, which killed one construction worker and left hundreds of prospective tenants without a home.

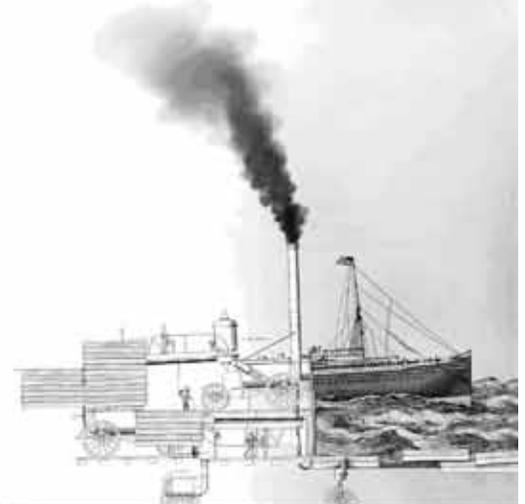
(Citation: Peter Foster, "Nine held over Shanghai building collapse," telegraph.co.uk, 6-29-2009)



Connecting the illustration: The reason this building collapse was so strange was that a building thought to be solid completely toppled over. No matter how strong the building looked, it fell over and was destroyed.

Today in our Some Assembly Required series, we come to the point in the life of the temple when the temple was destroyed. For many years, the people of God had neglected God's instruction and let the construction of the temple slowly crumble. They worshipped foreign gods. They mistreated and exploited others. And for every bright spot like the life of King Josiah, there were several dark spots.

Finally, Jerusalem fell, and as it did God allowed the temple to be destroyed. But even this destruction was part of the process God was using to bring His people back to Himself. And from this example, we discover that if we don't listen to God's instruction, we shouldn't be surprised if what we're building topples over. Let's look at the destruction stage of assembly to see what it has to say to us.

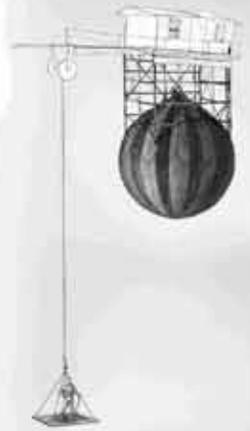


**Some Assembly Required*

Session Four Gathering Tool

Illustration: Civil war reconstruction

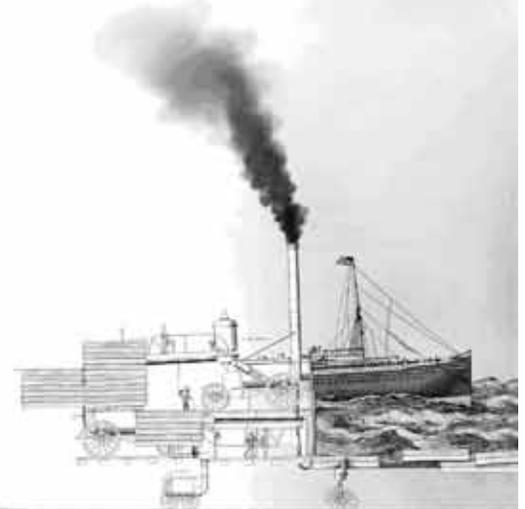
Of all the dark days of American history, perhaps the most painful were the days of the Civil War. In this battle between the north and the south, Americans fought against each other. This is often called the war where brother fought against brother. And the toll of this war was immense. Not only were countless young men killed, but cities and crops across the south were destroyed during the war. After the war concluded, President Abraham Lincoln began a process called Reconstruction. This reconstruction was political, as it ensured freed slaves the right to vote in the south, but it also focused on rebuilding the south through infrastructure such as new railroads and public schools. While the federal government was trying to help the south financially so that it could once again be a part of the union, the imposition of these programs was unpopular among many in the south. So after reconstruction ended in the 1870s, white supremacists and other racists soon rose to power in the south. (This was when the Ku Klux Klan was born.) These anti-reconstructionists imposed laws called Jim Crow laws that once again limited the rights of African-Americans. The rebuilding process meant that the southern states were once again in the union, but reconstruction was anything but a smooth success.



Connecting the illustration: The rebuilding of the United States after the Civil war was difficult, and these difficulties remind us that rebuilding rarely happens because things are going well. Most of the time, rebuilding becomes necessary when things are at their worst. In these moments, it's hard to find hope or any reason for optimism. No wonder rebuilding is incredibly hard.

But rebuilding is a key part of our spiritual growth. Because the process of growing spiritually comes some assembly required, we will often mess up. We'll construct things wrong or ignore the instructions or even wreak destruction on ourselves or others. No matter the reason, we will all find ourselves at the point when a restructuring is necessary for us to continue making progress toward the kind of people God calls us to be.

In these moments, it's easy to forget that rebuilding really is part of the process. In fact, in these moments of rebuilding, we see and show God's grace in deeper and fuller ways than we ever could when things are good. That happened in the history of the temple of God, and it can happen in our stories as well. So let us look at how we can restructure things so that what we rebuild ultimately points to God.



**Some Assembly Required*