The F5 tornado that ripped through Oklahoma City and surrounding towns in 1998 caused enormous devastation. It took things that could never be returned; it broke or crushed or twisted things that could never be repaired. Lives and homes were torn up or destroyed.

Sometimes we have storms in our lives that feel like an F5 tornado has hit. Trouble hits with such force it does damage that can never be undone. You may have had something taken from you that can never be returned. Situations, of course, can nearly destroy us, but people also cause devastation. Look at what happens to the victims of abuse, for example. Their innocence is taken and can never be returned. Their trust is broken, and it is hard for them to trust people, hard for them to even trust God. Their self-worth is crushed, and their view of themselves, others and God is twisted.

How do people survive disasters? Let’s look at how the survivors of the F5 tornado got through it. Number one, they realized they had suffered great losses. They experienced shock and unbelief at first, but eventually they faced the sad truth. Second, they grieved over their losses. Third, they cleaned up the debris. And finally they began to rebuild.

If you have been hit by a devastating storm what can you do? You can face the situation. Admit you have lost something. Grieve over your losses. Next, clear away the debris of hurt, anger, and shame that may be the aftermath of the storm. Admit your feelings (don't hide them or stuff them or minimize them). Pour out your heart to God. Then FORGIVE. Realize that what you lost cannot be restored, and turn that person (or situation) over to God to take care of. You are canceling the debt that person owes you. The person cannot repay or restore what he took, but you can cancel the debt and not try to extract restitution from him. It helps if the person admits his guilt, asks forgiveness and repents of his sin, but this does not always happen. For your own sake, however, forgiveness must take place before healing or rebuilding can begin. Healing and rebuilding will happen as you turn the whole situation over to God. He will enable you to forgive, and will heal the hurt, pain and shame. He will help you rebuild a worthwhile life.

Think of the devastation Rahab suffered. Her home was on the wall of Jericho and was destroyed when the walls of Jericho fell. Then she went to live in a strange land among strange people. But she believed in God and trusted Him to rebuild her life. And God did it! She became one of God's chosen people, marrying a Jewish man; their son was Boaz, a fine man who married Ruth. Rahab's son is also listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

The devastation of the F5 tornado took many months to clean up and rebuild and your devastation will take time too. Take it a day at a time and keep your focus on God. He is with you in the storm, and will heal and rebuild your life.

Scriptures to Ponder:
Psalm 62:8; Isaiah 43:2; Jeremiah 33:3;
Ephesians 4:32; 1 Peter 5:7; Joel 2:25.