Relationship Struggles And Understanding Of Characters In Cry, The Beloved Country

Many relationships are torn apart by selfish desires and brought together by the consequences of those actions. The characters in Cry, the Beloved Country with broken relationships find a better understanding of each other in their suffering. After renewing the relationship, it is strengthened, even if it is too late to make the physical change. The understanding between these characters is heightened as their suffering continues and as the pain sets it. Everyone finds understanding in different situations and suffering. Gertrude and Stephen Kumalo find understanding in sickness, Arthur and James Jarvis in death, and Absalom and Stephen Kumalo in sin corruption.

Gertrude and Stephen Kumalo have been separated by her loss of tribal values and instability. Gertrude fell into “sickness” and wayward lifestyle as explained by Msimangu. “Yes, she is very sick But it is not that kind of sickness. It is another, a worse kind of sickness. I sent for you firstly because she is a woman that is alone, and secondly because her brother is a priest. I do not know if she ever found her husband, but she has no husband now'(Page 53). His faith and forgiveness brought her back and they were able to understand each other and reunite. Stephen asked Gertrude if she wanted to come back when she finally felt the true deterioration of herself and her mental state because of Johannesburg and her actions. “‘Do you wish to come back? She nods her head. ‘I do not like Johannesburg,’ she says. ‘I am sick here. The child is sick also.’ ‘Do you wish with your heart to come back?’ She nods her head again'(Page 61).

Arthur and James Jarvis’s relationship was worsened when Arthur realized his lack of South African knowledge. James realized after Arthur’s death, that their relationship was not as close as he had thought because Arthur did not know the truth about his country and upbringing. Arthur felt betrayed that his father had not taught him about the truths of his country but only the ideals. “I was born on a farm, brought up by honourable parents, given all that a child could need or desire. They were upright and kind and law-abiding; they taught me my prayers and took me regularly to church; they had no trouble with servants and my father was never short of labour. From them I learned all that a child should learn of honour and charity and generosity. But of South Africa I learned nothing at all(Page 207). Only after reading Arthur’s papers does he see what Arthur had gone through. This knowledge brought him closer to his son. James finally understood his son and his values after reading the words of Abraham Lincoln. “He picked up the Abraham Lincoln and went down to the study again, and there opened the book at the Second Inaugural Address of the great president. He read it through and felt with a sudden lifting of spirit that there was a secret unfolding, a track picked up again. There was increasing knowledge of a stranger. He began to understand why the picture of this man was in the house of his son, and his multitude of books(Page 188).

Absalom Kumalo and his father, Stephen Kumalo were torn apart by the corruptness of Johannesburg. Absalom moved away from his father and was corrupted by the city and new lifestyle. His crime and punishment bring him back to the faith of his father. Absalom says in defence,” This Johannesburg is a dangerous place. A man never knows when he will be attacked'(Page 130). He is trying to give reason to why he lived with this corruption and sin.

When his father came to find him, he searched for a reason for his faults and mistakes rather than accepting the real situation. Stephen wanted Absalom to admit to his crime and ask for forgiveness. Out of shame, Absalom would not lie to his father, the priest, but claims to have prayed for forgiveness in court. "'I prayed there.' The prosecutor seems taken aback for a moment, but the judge says,' And what did you pray there' 'I prayed for forgiveness.'"(Page 197). He says that he asked for forgiveness in order to win the court over in his favour which we see later was not effective.

In all of the cases indicated, forgiveness and an open heart were key in the healing of the relational bond. We see that even with all the death, sickness, sin and pain, they found common ground with one another. They were able to see eye to eye and strengthen their relationship. Their suffering allowed them to understand each other's hurting and experiences. Gertrude and Stephen Kumalo find their understanding through her "sickness" and wish to have a deeper fulfilment. James Jarvis begins to understand his son Arthur when he is murdered and he has to opportunity to read his son's writing. Absalom is corrupted by Johannesburg and the people there which makes Stephen Kumalo want to work even harder to get his son to come back to Christ.