A Small Sin

A year after the last of their own three children had moved out of their home, Tony and Linda Collins had agreed to take in a foreign exchange student from Bulgaria, a former Soviet satellite country. Anna was 15 and from a rural mountain town in that country. She was instantly a blessing to the Collins’ home, bringing a warm and cheerful presence. However, an issue involving Anna has arisen that is forcing Tony and Linda to more closely examine how scripture must be used to guide young adults as they adapt to societal pressures.

Two months after her arrival, Linda found a sheet of paper with notes in Bulgarian in Anna’s jeans pocket while preparing to wash them. Thinking that the note was something important, she held on to it. At breakfast the next morning and not comfortable with the prospect of violating Anna’s privacy, Linda casually said, “Anna, I found this note in your jeans pocket when putting them in the wash. I thought it might be important, so I kept it for you.”

Anna nonchalantly replied, “Oh, it’s nothing; just a cheat sheet I used on an exam at home before coming here.”

Linda was startled and concerned that Anna was so matter-of-fact about cheating on an exam. “Do you use these things very often?” she asked.

“Oh yes, in my country, all kids do it,” Anna replied. “Is this a problem in the United States?”

Linda hesitated, not knowing what to say. Of course it was a problem with her, and it would definitely not be acceptable if discovered in the local high school. Despite not having any overt plan of teaching ethics and morality to the kids within their Christian home, she and Tony had prided themselves in raising their children to deal honestly with issues that arose in their lives. The topic of cheating had never before come up for serious discussion. Furthermore, she was concerned about what might happen if Anna was caught cheating in the high school. Yet, Linda also didn’t want to alienate her after having only been in the U.S. for such a short time. And she had to recognize that Anna wasn’t a Christian and might not understand the basis for the value system in the Collins’ family. So she simply answered with, “You haven’t done it here, have you?”

Anna responded with an abrupt “No.”

Linda brought the topic up with Tony that evening. He was equally concerned not only with the prospect of Anna getting into trouble at school, but also with the idea that such behavior was perhaps far more prevalent than either of them had thought. He immediately called their daughter in search of some frame of reference. Sue, their 22-year-old daughter, was a teacher...
in a small town elementary school nearby. Much to Tony’s dismay, Sue told him that cheating at various levels had become an increasingly acceptable activity among a growing number of students. Most disturbing to Tony was her assessment that such actions were even more prevalent among higher achieving students who understood the pressures to succeed in an increasingly competitive world. Furthermore, Sue suggested that the lack of guidance within the family and other institutions, such as their church, compounded the problem. Sure, all her Christian friends understood it was wrong, but many shrugged it off as a minor issue.

Following his conversation with Sue, Tony sat down with Linda to consider what to do next. The immediate issue of Anna’s cheating was important in and of itself. However, Tony was more concerned about what appears to be acceptable behavior among some high school kids. “What does this mean for believers applying our Christian principles?” Linda asked. “How can we talk to Anna, who is not a believer, and even believing kids that, as Christians, we are held to a higher standard? It isn’t only the cheating. We need to provide our kids with a scriptural foundation with which they can apply to the broader challenges of living in an increasingly secular society.”

Tony agreed. “Let’s study the Bible over the next week and then determine that Biblical structure for help in the decisions young people will have to make. This could not only benefit Anna but may also help our young people’s ministry at church. Most of all, this structure needs to be reasonably concise and straightforward so that all the kids can apply it in a multitude of situations.”

**ASSIGNMENT**

How should the Collins’ address the problem with Anna in a manner that uses a Christian viewpoint, but also recognizes her cultural background?
My Scriptural Research:

Group Scriptural Research:

Decisions / Recommendations:

Primary Scriptural References: