



THE SOCIAL NETWORK (Cert 15)

Directed by: David Fincher (2010)

Length: 115 minutes

As this film carries a 15 certificate, it is probably worth you watching it first to determine whether it's appropriate for your young people.

SUMMARY

Loosely based on real events, *The Social Network* is an Oscar-winning account of the creation of the global social networking website, Facebook. The film traces the story of Facebook's inventor, Mark Zuckerberg, (Jesse Eisenberg) as he takes the initial idea for a networking site for Harvard University students and develops it into the worldwide phenomenon it is today.

However, while Facebook is meant to build friendships, Zuckerberg's own relationships increasingly deteriorate the more successful he becomes. This is highlighted by the film jumping back and forth between the story of Facebook's creation in 2003 and five years on to 2008 where Zuckerberg is being sued by two sets of people simultaneously.

One of these lawsuits is brought forward by the Winklevoss twins, fellow Harvard students who initially approach Zuckerberg with an idea for a social networking site which they want him to develop. Zuckerberg agrees to work for them but instead chooses to start his own site. The Winklevoss twins accuse him of stealing their idea and opt for legal action.

The other law suit is brought by Zuckerberg's best friend and Facebook co-founder, Eduardo Saverin (Andrew Garfield). While Saverin plays a key part in the early days, providing much needed start up

finance, he finds himself gradually edged out of the company as it becomes financially successful.

The film raises key questions about valuing relationships, underlined poignantly in the final scene where Zuckerberg is portrayed as lonely and friendless, despite his success and vast wealth.

WHAT YOU FELT ABOUT THE FILM

Sometimes young people find it hard to contribute to a group discussion. They may feel shy or that their contribution might appear silly. The first part of the session is therefore a chance for young people to think about the film and begin to develop a reaction to what they have seen in a way that everyone will have something to contribute. This is a simple, quick exercise to get everyone thinking about their reaction to the film.

Ask all the young people to stand up. Tell them to sit down if:

- They're on Facebook right now!
- They've been on Facebook in the last hour.
- They check Facebook several times a day.
- They check Facebook once a day.
- They check Facebook once a week.
- They check Facebook about once a month.
- They don't have a Facebook account.

Assuming most young people have a Facebook account, go around the room and ask each young person to share one thing they either really like about Facebook or one thing they really dislike. You may also want to ask what the one thing is they would change about Facebook, if they could.

In small groups, ask the young people to come up with the idea for a website which doesn't yet exist but they feel needs to. Who would it be for?

KEY THEMES IN THE FILM

Based on the story of Facebook, a social network that a vast number of young people use, there are few films more topical at the moment. However, the issues it raises, those of relationships and their breakdown, are timeless. This section gives a chance for young people to examine these themes in more detail.

1. The Exclusion of Exclusiveness

Explain to the young people that you've got a special task for some of them to do. It's not easy and will require people of a particular degree of maturity but it will be well worth it. Explain that you're going to pick a couple of people (depending on the size of the group you may say you're selecting more or less than this) but you don't want to embarrass them so could everyone please close their eyes? Explain that you will tap the person you choose on the shoulder.

Once everyone's eyes are closed (no peeking!) walk around the young people to create the impression that you're selecting people but don't touch anyone. Say that it's okay to open eyes. Explain that you'll tell the people you've selected what they're doing later but, for their benefit (so they don't take their being chosen for granted), you'd like the others to share how they feel about not having been picked. Encourage honesty. Did they wonder why they weren't good enough?

Explain that there is no special task and that no one has been picked. But, even though they didn't know what this 'special task' was, at least some of the young people are likely to have felt excluded by not being picked. Ask why they think this is.

Can they think of any other time when they've felt excluded from a certain group? Have they ever been aware of being one of the people doing the excluding?

Watch the clip from scene 5 that starts at 29.52 and runs until 32.02.

In the clip we see Eduardo being forced to undergo a harsh initiation ceremony in order to be part of an exclusive Harvard club. Later, we learn of him being made to undergo further 'tests', such as carrying around a chicken for a week. Would the members of your group be willing to do the same?

Ask the young people if it's wrong to want to be part of a certain group. Why or why not?

Explain that the urge to 'belong' is not wrong. We are made to be social, relational people. It's good to be part of a group, to be encouraged and supported, to share a joint goal and to enjoy the company of others (among other reasons). Talk about a group that you're part of (team, club, social group), explaining why you enjoy being part of it. Encourage others to do the share their experiences.

However, there are times when it can be unhealthy to want to be part of certain groups. Do the young people have any examples?

Explain that a lot depends on our motives. For many people, their desire to be part of a certain group stems from their own insecurity; they feel they'll be worth more in people's eyes if they become part of a certain group. What dangers can the young people see developing from this?

Possible dangers include:

- Feeling the need to become something we're not in order to be accepted.

- We put down others to make ourselves look better and more worthy of acceptance.
- If our security is coming from being part of a group, what happens if, for some reason, we find ourselves outside of that group again?
- Doing things we don't really want to do in order to fit in. We see one example of this with Eduardo's initiation ceremony. Other examples might include taking drugs, or binge drinking, or other things we know aren't good for us. Although it's an extreme case, it may be worth pointing out that this is how some people get drawn into terrorism. Some 'terrorists' are just ordinary, insecure people who desperately want to be accepted by a group and end up committing hideous acts in order to prove themselves.

Key question: Where does our need to belong to a particular group come from?

Relevant Bible verses:

- Romans 8.31
- Proverbs 12.9
- Galatians 3.28
- Matthew 23 (especially vv. 5–7, 27–28)
- Ephesians 2.12–14

2. Geniuses or jokes?

Before the session, prepare a few photos of public figures you admire for their physical achievements and gifting (sports players, actors, singers, etc.). Show them to the young people and explain why you admire these figures. Encourage them to share their heroes and their reasons for liking them.

Next show a picture of someone you admire whose achievements are linked more to character than gifting

(e.g. Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr.). Explain why you admire this person and ask if they can identify the difference between someone like that and a celebrity we admire for their talents (e.g. Wayne Rooney).

Alternatively, you could show the young people a print out or demo of someone's Facebook profile page. (Preferably this should be of someone whom the young people don't really know-obviously make sure you have their permission first!) Looking at things such as education, film and music likes and dislikes, political views, etc., ask the young people if they think this is someone they would want to be friends with. How much can you really tell from what someone posts on their profile? Does it tell you if someone's honest or a liar? Does it tell you if they're lazy or hard working? Mean or generous? A Good Samaritan or a secret mugger? How do we know what someone's really like?

Watch the clip from scene 7 that starts at 42.39 and runs until 44.41.

In the clip we see Mark Zuckerberg being praised by people and attracting interest from girls (having started the film being hated by every girl on campus), all because of his genius in creating Facebook. However, on more than one occasion in the film Mark is described by people who actually know him as a joke (or an 'a**hole' to be more precise).

Our culture is obsessed with celebrity and becoming famous but people seem less concerned with why they're famous. Ask the young people which of these they would rather be:

- A World Cup winning footballer who had a reputation for swearing at TV cameras and arguing with referees or a Division Two footballer who was known by his teammates

to be the ultimate in playing fair and being respectful even in defeat?

- The millionaire Chief Executive of a multinational company who had affairs with every new secretary or a Tesco's shelf stacker who was a faithful and loving spouse?
- A Brit award-winning musician who spent their free time collecting sports cars or a street busker who gave a percentage of his earnings each day to a cancer charity?

Ask how many of the young people believe they have the talent to become the next Lewis Hamilton, Ellie Goulding, or Bill Gates. The fact is that very few people are given the gifts to become these world famous superstars. However, we can choose what character of person we're going to be.

Key question: Are we more concerned with our physical achievements or with whether we develop a good character?

Relevant Bible verses:

- Proverbs 3.3–4; 28.6
- 1 Corinthians 1.26–31
- Psalm 103.15–18
- Luke 12.16–21

3. Sticks and stones ...

Ask the young people to put the following injuries in the order they would take to heal (there are documented accounts of people suffering each of these; particularly the last two!):

- Having your foot trodden on by an elephant.
- Sitting on a hornet's nest.
- Jumping from 10 feet high onto a bicycle without a seat.

- Being run over by a milk float.
- Lying out in a hot summer's sun all day in a swimsuit with no sun block on.
- Getting your eyelid stuck in a jumper zip as you put it on.
- Hiding an illegal fire cracker down your trousers as it was about to explode.

Once the young people have put these in some sort of order, explaining their reasoning, ask where they would place the following:

- Being told by your boyfriend/girlfriend/best friend/parents that they'd always hated you really; they thought you were worthless and they never wanted to see you again.

Watch the clip from scene 8 that starts at 49.33 and runs until 51.33.

The film begins with Mark's girlfriend, Erica, breaking up with him. In revenge, Mark writes a drunken blog in which he makes all kinds of cruel comments about her. Although he never says sorry, we get the impression Mark regrets what he does (the final shot of the film is of him desperately waiting to see if she's accepted his Facebook friend request). However, the damage has been done. Mark's unfair remarks are there on the web for all to see. And even if they were removed from the internet, they're clearly firmly ingrained on Erica's memory. How long do the young people think it would take for the wounds to heal if someone did that to them?

Ask the young people to reflect quietly for a moment on hurtful things that have been said to them. Have the wounds healed? Are they able to forgive the people that hurt them?

On the other hand, can they remember hurtful things that they've said which they wish they could take

back? Have they apologised? Have they been forgiven by that person?

Words can be powerful and destructive. We should be careful about saying things in the heat of the moment which we later regret. At the same time, we've all done it and, with that in mind, we should be ready to forgive others for the things which they say against us.

You may wish to close this section by saying a prayer echoing these thoughts, thanking God that we are all infinitely forgiven because of Jesus. Give thanks that Jesus understands our hurts and ask for his help in forgiving others.

Key question: Are we as quick to forgive others for what they say as we are to say bad things about other people?

Relevant Bible verses:

- James 3.2–12
- Proverbs 10.19; 11.12; 12.18
- Ephesians 4.29
- John 6.68
- Matthew 18.21–35

4. Sweet Relationships

Before the session, place a single doughnut on a plate and put it in the middle of the room.

Ask if anyone would like the doughnut. (You should get at least one or two volunteers!) Acknowledge their interest but ask if anyone knows who the doughnut belongs to. You'd like to give the doughnut to someone but you don't know if it's yours to give. It could be embarrassing if someone started to eat it and then the rightful owner of the doughnut walked in.

Watch the clip from scene 6 that starts at 33.24 and runs until 35.30.

In the clip we see Mark realising that Facebook could be a great tool for letting people know whether or not they're single. Later, we see Eduardo's girlfriend, Christy, getting upset because Eduardo's Facebook status declares him 'single'.

In groups, ask the young people to consider:

- How people revealed their relationship status before Facebook.
- Whether and why it's a good thing to know someone's relationship status.
- Why someone would choose not to reveal their relationship status.

While some people choose not to reveal their status for wrong reasons (like married people removing wedding rings when having an affair), sometimes people deliberately give the wrong impression for their own protection. For example, many single female missionaries outside the Western world will wear a wedding ring (often claiming they're 'married to Jesus') to prevent getting unwanted attention from local men.

Point out that, when a doughnut doesn't belong to anyone, it is available to whoever wants it. But a doughnut is not a human being (obviously!) While it's useful to know what someone's relationship status is there is a danger (if we just see the people as available/unavailable) that we fail to see people as real human beings.

While doughnuts may look attractive, that doesn't mean that they're good for us. Can the young people think of some reasons why wanting to go out with someone isn't always a good thing?

Key question: Just because someone is single, does that mean we have a right to go after them?

Relevant Bible verses:

- Song of Songs 8.4
- Proverbs 12.4; 19.14
- 1 Corinthians 7.27–28, 32–35, 39
- 2 Corinthians 6.14

5. I'll be there for you?

Before the session download a copy of the single 'I'll be there for you' by The Rembrandts (Otherwise known as the *Friends* theme tune).

One of the main features of Facebook is making friends. How many Facebook 'friends' do the young people have? (There are no prizes for the person with the most.)

Play the Rembrandts' track to the young people and ask what the song says about friendship.

In groups, ask the young people to:

- List the qualities which they would expect from a good friend. This should include how they expect a true friend to react in more negative situations (e.g. would they expect a friend to always agree with them, even if they were doing something wrong? How would they expect a friend to react if you'd done something to hurt them?)
- How do they measure up as friends under those criteria?
- How many of their Facebook 'friends' would count as friends under the criteria they've just come up with? Are there different levels of friendship?
- While the idea of being a friend may include 'being there' for the other person, would

there be any point at which they would feel it was right to break off a friendship?

Once the young people have fed back, ask them to consider the friendship between Mark and Eduardo. In groups again, ask the young people to list as many *specific* incidents as possible which show their concern and respect for each other; point out that there will be prizes for whichever team can remember the most examples. Feedback and reward the winning team with sweets or chocolates.

Watch the clip from scene 15 that starts at 1.35.08 and runs until 1.42.47.

In the clip we see the crunch point for Eduardo and Mark's relationship. Mark effectively cheats Eduardo out of his share of Facebook (worth millions of dollars), despite having been dependent on Eduardo's money during the early days of the site. Eduardo decides to sue Mark in response.

Do the young people think that Eduardo made the right decision? Suppose he had decided not to challenge Mark, despite being cheated. Would that have been being a good friend? Would there have been any other way to respond? What would they have done?

Key question: How can we be the best friends possible?

Relevant Bible verses:

- Psalm 133.1–3
- Proverbs 17.9, 17; 18.24; 27.6
- Matthew 18.15–17
- John 15.15

COMPARING THE STORY

The third part of the session is a chance to compare the story of the film with a story in the Bible. What are the similarities and differences, and what does this tell us about God's Kingdom?

Young people may not grasp all the theological points that could be made, but it's important for them to begin to get used to the idea of critiquing what they see and holding it against the values and beliefs of the Christian faith.

Some of this reflection may come from an open discussion and as seen above, there are many themes and directions that this could take.

One of the ironies of this film about Facebook (a site dedicated to connecting people and making friends) is that, according to the film, the site's own creator seems to have little idea of what true friendship is about. Mark and Eduardo's slowly disintegrating relationship is the great tragedy of the movie, torn apart by selfishness and miscommunication.

By contrast, the Old Testament book of Samuel provides us with one of the more tender examples of friendship and sacrifice in human history: that of Jonathan and David.

Briefly explain the history: David was one of King Saul's most trusted men. David killed many of Saul's enemies, including Goliath, the giant. But Saul was jealous of David and tried to have him killed. Having escaped Saul, David approached Saul's son, Jonathan, who was his best friend.

Read (or encourage the young people to read) 1 Samuel 20. Explain that the promises made to each other were kept, despite the fact that Jonathan's father spent most of the rest of his life trying to have David killed. Despite the fact that, with David dead, Jonathan could have expected to have become king

himself, he always supported David's right to be king (1 Samuel 23.16–18). You may want to comment on David's grief at Jonathan's death (2 Samuel 1.25–26) and his determination to show love to Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9).

Invite the young people to consider the two friendships and comment upon how one could go so right and the other so wrong. For example, consider questions like ...

- What is the great 'prize' at stake in each situation?
- Which 'prize' would you have found the greater temptation: the financial rewards of Facebook or the Kingship of Israel?
- What is the key incident which breaks Eduardo's friendship with Mark? What would it have taken for this incident to have been avoided?
- While David had been anointed for Kingship (under God's command), Jonathan could justifiably have expected the Crown to come to him, as eldest son of the reigning King. Why was this not a source of conflict for them? What do you think it took for Jonathan to swallow his personal pride and ambition in this?
- David and Jonathan's friendship was ended by Jonathan's death. Mark and Eduardo's friendship was ended by Mark's selfishness. Which do you find more tragic?
- How did David continue to show Jonathan kindness after his death?
- What signs of affection for each other do we still see even after the great rift between Mark and Eduardo?

- Do you think that the friendship between the two co-founders of Facebook will ever be healed? What do you think it would take to repair such a great split? Is it simply a matter of ownership and money or is there more at stake?
- Which friendship (Eduardo/Mark; David/Jonathan) do your own relationships best mirror? What would it take for your friendships to become more like Jonathan and David's?

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