



What makes a man?

The session outline provided serves as a guide for discovering what makes us unique as men, what traits we admire in other men and seek to emulate and the ways in which our faith can help us develop a positive 'male' identity.

The purpose of the session is to get the guys talking about the kind of people they look up to and why and how to take up the challenge of being young men of faith. This was originally an MYX resource, written for the Christian Muslim forum, and has been adapted for The Feast.

This event takes 6 hours, but could be adapted to be shorter, or even longer with breaks and other activities (ie. over a residential weekend).

In case it isn't obvious this is a boys only event!

Session Outline

Time	Activity	Description	Materials
15 min	Arrive and register	Get people to make name badges. Introduce day, house-keeping	Pens Sticky labels
15 min	Ice-breakers	Superhero sorter	Superhero cards
30 min	The male brain	Take the BBC brain test!	Laptops/tablets Rulers
50 min	Physical challenge and trust	Physicality is a big part of male identity, encourage the guys.	
15 min	Break	Drinks, snacks and mingling	Drinks and snacks!
5 min	Guidelines for Dialogue	Go through the guidelines to create a safe space for discussions.	Guideline for Dialogue
30 min	It takes one to know one	Looking at video clips. Group discussions.	Video clips Projector/screen
45 min	Lunch break	Food and mingling	
30 min	Genuinely masculinity	Looking at faith and being male.	Bible and Qu'ran passages
60 min	Role models	Constructing a model man.	Big paper Pens
15 min	Break	I chance to mingle and relax	Food!
30 min	Rites of passage	Looking for rites of passage from around the world.	Computers/resources on rites of passage
30 min	He who dares	Setting personal challenges.	Paper Pens
15 min	Feedback		Feedback forms
5 min	End		

Leader's Notes

Arrive

It's really important to make people feel at ease as they come in, especially as some might be particularly nervous. Making name labels takes the pressure off learning names, which can be hard in a big group.

It might be an idea to play some music as people come in, and make sure leaders are welcoming and chatting to the young people informally. (NB: for some Muslims music is forbidden).

Gather everyone together and take the opportunity to run through any housekeeping issues (toilets, emergencies etc).

Superhero Sorter

Split the group into teams. Give each team a list of superhero names and a description of their super-powers. They have to decide which are genuine superheroes and which have been made up, then match the right superhero to their superpowers... the first group to get them all right is the winner of the challenge.

This is a light-hearted way to introduce the idea of what makes a 'hero', in particular thinking about strengths and qualities that might be considered 'masculine'. Here's where you get to be creative! If you've always wanted to have a superhero alter-ego, now's your time to unleash your inner-hero... on paper, at least! Feel free to use some of the more well-known superheroes, the likes of Superman, Spiderman, Batman, Wolverine etc. but throw in a few of the more obscure characters from the comic-book archives as well as some you've created out of thin air! Be sure to come up with super-powers for your Marvel-esque creations! Unless you've got some serious comic-book fans in your midst, they're not likely to know all of the characters, so when they think they've got their characters sorted, check their answers and tell them how many superheroes they've correctly identified and how many super-powers they've matched.

The Male Brain

Time to find out how we think or, more to the point, the way we think. Get everyone to answer questions to find out whether they have a more 'male' or 'female' brain as they respond to a set of circumstances or deal with certain information. The idea is not to get people questioning their male identity, but to understand traits that are more 'common' to guys than girls, thus getting a better picture of the kind of things that 'make a man'. Whilst we're not about stereotyping here, studies show that certain traits and mental competencies that are more common to men than women and vice versa. The idea here is to show that the way we think and process information can have a lot to do with our gender and that there are 'strengths', patterns of behaviour and ways of thinking that can be described as 'masculine'.

The BBC aired a series in 2005 called 'Secrets of the Sexes' which explored the relationship between gender and thought processes, amongst other things. On the programme's website there's a 'brain sex'* test which takes the participant through a series of activities that determine whether you display more male or female traits in the way you process information. If possible, get everyone to do the test online and compare results. If internet access is an issue, you can search online for downloadable tests, although you may find the questions are a bit more subjective so results might not be as clear.

*www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/sex/add_user.shtml is the site if you do have internet access.

Physical Challenge and Trust

Shared activities are often a great way of guys getting to know one another, especially if there is an element of challenge and/or competition! In terms of making this activity feasible, you might want to consider where you choose to hold the session as a whole! A climbing wall, for example, would be a great tool for this activity. But to keep things more practical and cost effective, a good alternative might be to bring along some gym equipment or a Wii® (or similar) and set the guys a physical challenge. Do make sure you have done the necessary risk assessments and know how to use any gym equipment safely with young people.

It takes one to know one...

Watch a series of clips of movie scenes that depict a range of male roles. Are there any common traits amongst each of the characters? What makes these characters 'appealing' to other men? What 'masculine' characteristics do they portray that you identify with? Do you think these men represent a true picture of what makes a man?

Everyone has screen icons. Flawed or not, the characters portrayed in movies tell us a lot about the kind of men we identify with and even idolise, so they provide us with a helpful insight into the kind of characteristics that we think of as masculine. Choose clips from a range of movies – action, comedy, drama, perhaps even a chick-flick to give a flavour of the different 'roles' men play e.g. protector, role model, provider, teacher, leader, lover etc. Individual video clips can be found on YouTube.

Food!

Sharing a meal together is a great way to finish the day. Try to get some local cuisine, just make sure that everyone can eat it (eg. halal meat, or vegetarian food).

Genuine Masculinity

In their book 'Cut to the chase', Lee Jackson and Baz Gascoyne refer to a quote from Phil Wall: "If genuine masculinity does not find a way to be expressed and affirmed, then it will find a dysfunctional expression".

Do you think that is true? What is genuine masculinity – do the Bible and Qu’ran give any ideas? How should masculinity be ‘expressed and affirmed’? What ‘dysfunctional expressions’ do you see or experience around you?

Following on from the previous activity, having outlined masculine traits, now we move on to consider how these traits find either positive or negative expressions and how our faith can help us find or cultivate those positive expressions.

You might find it helpful to put together a series of images on PowerPoint that help depict masculinity in its various expressions – both positive and negative and intersperse them with Scriptures from the Bible and Qu’ran. Play this on a loop for the guys to refer to and draw ideas from. Provide copies of the passages from the Bible and Qu’ran for the groups to read, share and discuss.

Role Models

What roles do other men play in shaping our identities as ‘men’? Who are the men in your lives that have had a positive influence on you? What have they taught you – especially about what it means to be a Christian or Muslim man?

In groups get young people to share their answers to these questions. Then use those answers to ‘make a man’. Construct a ‘model’ man using different materials for different parts, each representing something you’ve been taught about what it means to be a man.

This activity is meant to help the guys draw together their thoughts and ideas about the masculine traits they’ve identified and how they’ve seen them expressed positively in the lives of real men. A lot of people learn more through doing than through talking, especially boys, so this should be a really helpful, tactile experience. Try to source a range of materials including some that convey masculine traits: strong, sturdy, rough etc. You can get a lot of materials from local recycling centres – see if your local council has an arts project that uses recycled materials.

Rites of Passage

These are common to most cultures in history – acts that determine how a boy crosses over the threshold into manhood. There aren’t specific ‘rites of passage’ in contemporary British culture so this activity gives the young men the chance to discuss and decide what should be a test of someone’s readiness to be a man!

Find out a bit about some of the weird and wonderful things done in other cultures’ and share these with the group, then decide for yourselves what makes a man. Much as physical displays of strength and agility are common features in male circles, proving oneself by fulfilling certain tasks is also a familiar trait.

The purpose of this activity is to have fun setting challenges, whilst exploring the purpose that 'rites of passage' serve in helping a young man 'prove himself' i.e. learning self-reliance, responsibility, self-control etc.

Collect together a range of articles that explore rites of passage – encyclopaedia entries, excerpts from historical sources, information about cultural groups, articles from sources such as National Geographic. Give the guys time to enjoy reading through these! Help them to draw out some of the features of these rites posing questions like, 'what is this meant to prove,' 'how does it demonstrate the characteristics of a man'?

He who dares

To conclude the day, encourage the guys to set themselves personal challenges and consider how they might achieve them. There'll no doubt be some mad ideas that come out of the previous activity, but if possible, let the boys have a go at trying some of them out!

Draw things to a close by setting personal challenges. Give them each three strips of paper to write their challenges on and a piece of card to stick the challenges to, face down (Blue Tac is best for this). Give groups pieces of paper with Scriptures from the Qu'ran and Bible printed on them. Encourage the boys to read through the Scriptures and take a copy of any that they find encouraging or even challenging. Get them to lay these Scriptures face-up on their sheet over the challenges they've just set themselves.

They'll have this to take with them as a reminder of the day, a challenge to face and overcome tests & trials in life and an encouragement that God will be with them in all that they do.

Feedback

You might want to do some sort of feedback, either verbal or written, so you can ascertain what went well and what could be improved for a subsequent event. You can do this with feedback forms, getting them to write things on post-it notes, or even stand in a circle and throw a beanbag around sharing their highlight.

Appendix 1: Bible passages on this theme

1 Peter 4: 1-2 – Jesus lived life as a man, so we have him as an example.

Galatians 3: 26 – We're all sons of God, marked by our relationship with Him.

Galatians 4: 6 – Because we're His sons, we've been given His Spirit to help teach us how to follow in our Father's footsteps.

Romans 8: 14-17 – The reverse is true, if we follow the leading of the Spirit that shows we're sons of God. As sons we are to live like Jesus, enduring trials and sharing in his suffering.

John 10: 10 – Life is meant to be full and fulfilling – that's what Jesus came to give.

Hebrews 12: 1-2 – God's given us role-models to encourage us and He sent His son for us to follow. Perhaps in the context of these verses we might recognise Jesus not only as our end-goal (as in Philippians 3: 12-13) but as our pace-maker, the one who sets us on course and establishes the pattern for the race we're running.

Appendix 1: Islamic References

'And the believing slaves of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth with calmness and humility.' (Qur'an 25:63)

'And whoever places his reliance and trust in Allah then He will suffice him.' (Quran 65:3)

'None of you believes perfectly until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.' (The Prophet Muhammad)

'Hand over your affairs to the One who knows best, for He is the Knower of every heart and every desire.' (Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib)

Imam al-Qushayri (*rahmatu'Llahi 'alayh*) summaries the nature of *positive* masculinity. In Arabic this is called *muru'a* or manliness. Conceptually, manliness is closely related to *futuwwa* or chivalry. Imam al-Qushayri says in his famous *Risala*, "The root of chivalry is that the servant strives constantly for the sake of others. Chivalry is that you do not see yourself as superior to others. The one who has chivalry is the one who has no enemies. Chivalry is that you be an enemy of your own soul for the sake of your Lord. Chivalry is that you act justly without demanding justice for yourself. Chivalry is [having]... beautiful character."