

by Rusty Wright

Elvis lives. At least in the hearts of his fans, and they are everywhere! Warner Bros. new movie, *Elvis*, extends the legacy. Why does the raven-haired, swivel-hipped crooner still fascinate millions nearly 45 years after his death?

Hundreds of Elvis fan clubs have spanned the globe from Memphis to Moscow, Africa to Australia, Belgium to Brazil, Sweden to Sri Lanka. Fandom is multigenerational, comprising not just his contemporaries; modest but noteworthy Elvis popularity even exists among Millennials and Gen Z.

The *Elvis* cast includes Austin Butler (*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*) as Elvis, Oscar-winner Tom Hanks (*Forrest Gump*, *Philadelphia*) as Colonel Tom Parker, and Olivia DeJonge as Priscilla Presley. *Elvis* presents a fascinating glimpse into the

Elvis movie:

All Shook Up

meets

Heartbreak Hotel

star's passions and times. Like his life, the film is fast-moving, flamboyant, entertaining, permeated with pizzazz and pain.

Always on My Mind

Elvis Aaron Presley died on 16 August 1977, at 42. His songs still fill the airwaves. His face graces postage stamps and velvet paintings worldwide. Thousands trek to Graceland, his Memphis home, to pay homage to the King of Rock and Roll.

Impersonators abound. The “Flying Elvi” (plural of “Elvis”, get it?) combines skydiving with Elvis nostalgia. Merchants sell “Barbie Loves Elvis” doll sets, Elvis mouse pads, and Elvis wine. There’s a “First Presleyterian Church”.

Even academics are into Elvis. The University of Mississippi has held international conferences on Elvis Presley. Scholarly seminars included “Civil Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and Elvis”; “Elvis: The Twinless Twins’ Search for Spiritual Meaning” (Elvis’s twin

brother died at birth); and “Elvis ’n’ Jesus”.

America. What a country.

Stuck on You?

Many Graceland pilgrims display deep reverence with candlelight ceremonies, flowers and icons. Some fans talk to Elvis. One scholar at Mississippi’s International Conference on Elvis Presley noted that “without looking at spirituality, you can’t explain the Elvis phenomena”.¹

Do some have a psychological need to believe in Elvis? A southern California M.D. wondered if fans may be bonding with a romanticised part of their youth. And, he added: “People who don’t have God make a god out of all sorts of things”.

Are You Lonesome Tonight?

Does the Elvis craze suggest deep human longings? Some seek happiness through success, wealth or relationships. Probably everyone has at least one “Elvis” in their life: a person, idea, team, goal or possession that inspires

their devotion and quest for fulfillment.

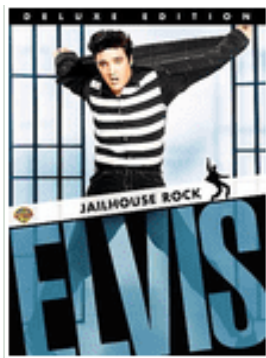
But human-based searches for ultimate happiness can be risky. There will almost always be someone richer, more intelligent or articulate, better looking or more popular than we are. Our teams will lose; our heroes will have flaws. Even if you reach the top...what then? The death rate is still 100%.

In the film, Elvis's manager Col. Tom Parker reflects near the end of the singer's career: "We are the same, you and I. We are two odd, lonely children, reaching for eternity". The movie

clearly portrays the impact of Christian faith on young Elvis, who, at a tent revival meeting, undergoes an ecstatic body-shaking spiritual experience that mimics—and possibly inspires—his adult stage performances.

He Touched Me

Probably few realise that Elvis's only Grammy Awards came for "How Great Thou Art" and "He Touched Me", famous songs of faith. The lyrics, which reflect his own spiritual roots, point to hope beyond human accomplishment.



Mark Anthony, one of the myriad Elvis impersonators, on stage during the "Surfers Paradise Elvis Birthday Bash", 7 January 2011, Surfers Paradise, QLD Australia.

The biblical God alluded to in these songs is described elsewhere as a friend of those in need. "The Lord is my shepherd", wrote an Israelite king. "I have all that I need".³

Spiritual matters, of course, can be controversial. Respected universities like Duke, Harvard, and Michigan study faith's impact on health. An increasing number of healthcare professionals emphasise "whole-person" care—seeking physical, psychological, and spiritual health.

Some counselors encourage their clients to get in touch with their "inner Elvis". As the world commemorates the forty-fifth anniversary of his passing, perhaps it would be more fruitful to look beyond our "inner Elvis" to Someone greater.

Notes

- 1 <https://probe.org/elvis-has-left-the-building/>
- 2 <https://www.everyperson.com/features/know-God.html>
- 3 Psalm 23:1.

Although he is remembered as a rock and roll superstar, Elvis Presley acted in an incredible 31 movies between 1956 and 1969! He starred alongside screen legends Ursula Andress, Ed Asner, Carolyn Jones, Dean Jones, Angela Lansbury, Walter Matthau, Mary Tyler Moore, and more.

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. www.RustyWright.com
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