SAINT JOHN PAUL THE GREAT

His Five Loves

JASON EVERT

BOOK SUMMARY

A Life Shaped by Providence

A Heart Formed by Loss and Resistance. Evert opens with a brief biography built on a simple premise: the surest way to know a person is to discover what he loved. Karol Wojtyła was born in Wadowice, Poland, in 1920 and lost his mother, his older brother, and finally his father before he was twenty-one. He lived through the Nazi occupation, working manual labor while secretly preparing for the priesthood in an underground seminary. After his ordination in 1946 he studied in Rome, wrote his doctorate on Saint John of the Cross, and returned to serve in a rural parish, then as a university chaplain and professor in Poland. Under Communism he became bishop, then Archbishop of Kraków, and in 1978 he was elected pope. Evert traces the hand of Providence through each stage, showing how suffering did not harden Wojtyła but deepened his capacity to love, and how the five loves that defined his pontificate were already visible in the young priest, student, and pastor.

> *"Be not afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ." — Inaugural Homily, 1978*
>
> *"Let your Spirit descend and renew the face of the earth." — Warsaw, 1979*

Love of Young People

Young People Are Drawn to Those Who Believe in Them. John Paul II's affection for the young began long before he became pope, in his years as a priest in Kraków when he hiked, kayaked, and camped with university students, celebrating Mass on overturned kayaks and talking through questions of love, vocation, and faith. Evert explains that he understood the idealism of youth intuitively and refused to water down the Gospel for them. Instead he challenged them to greatness, convinced that they were longing for something worth giving their lives to. As pope he carried this approach to the world stage, founding World Youth Day and drawing millions of young people to gatherings across the globe. Evert recounts that the crowds came not simply to see a celebrity, but because they sensed in him a man who pointed them beyond himself to Christ. The Pope told young people that their restlessness was a desire for God, and that they were called to be saints, not spectators.

> *"It is Jesus in fact that you are seeking when you dream of happiness." — Tor Vergata, 2000*
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> *"Do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium!" — Tor Vergata, 2000*

Human Love

Love Is the Fundamental Vocation of Every Person. Long before his Theology of the Body catecheses, Wojtyła was counseling engaged couples, writing about love and responsibility, and walking with young people through the challenges of dating and marriage. Evert shows that his teaching rests on a conviction that the human person is made for love, and that love means a sincere gift of self rather than the use of another person for pleasure. The human body, in this vision, is not a mere instrument but expresses the person and reveals God's own self-giving love. Evert draws out how this vision speaks to a culture confused about sexuality, restoring dignity to marriage, chastity, celibacy, and the family. Stories from those who knew the Pope show a man who treated every person he met as a gift, and who defended the dignity of the person precisely because he took love so seriously.

> *"Man cannot live without love." — Redemptor Hominis, 10*
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> *"Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being." — Familiaris Consortio, 11*
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> *"...and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible." — Theology of the Body, 19:4*

Love of the Eucharist

The Mass Is the Center of Every Day. Evert presents the Eucharist as the wellspring of John Paul II's energy, courage, and fruitfulness. Those closest to him describe a man who spent long stretches in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, often prostrate on the chapel floor, and who treated the chapel as a place of special inspiration for his thinking and writing. His daily schedule, his travels, and his decisions all flowed from the Mass, which he celebrated with deep reverence wherever he went. Evert connects this devotion to the Pope's encyclical on the Eucharist and to the Year of the Eucharist he proclaimed near the end of his life, showing that his teaching on the sacrament was a testimony of personal experience. For him, adoration was not a pious extra but a school of love where the Christian learns to receive and then give himself away.

> *"The Eucharist is the secret of my day." — John Paul II*
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> *"The Church draws her life from the Eucharist." — Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 1*
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> *"For me, the Mass constitutes the center of my life and my every day." — John Paul II*

Love of Our Lady

Total Consecration to Mary Leads Closer to Christ. Mary was a constant presence in Karol Wojtyła's life, from the loss of his mother in childhood to the Marian piety of Polish Catholicism. Evert follows his discovery, as a young man, of the total consecration taught by Saint Louis de Montfort, which gave rise to his papal motto, Totus Tuus, meaning “entirely yours.” He shows that this devotion never competed with devotion to Jesus; Wojtyła understood that giving oneself completely to Mary was the surest way of belonging completely to her Son. The Rosary was his favorite prayer, and he even added the Luminous Mysteries to it. Evert highlights the attempt on his life on May 13, 1981, the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, and the Pope's conviction that Mary had protected him, a gratitude he expressed by placing the bullet in the crown of her statue at Fatima.

> *“The Rosary is my favorite prayer.” — Angelus, 1978*
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> *“...a maternal hand guided the bullet's path.” — Fatima, 1991*

Love of the Cross

Suffering United to Christ Becomes Redemptive. The final love Evert explores is the one that marked John Paul II's life from beginning to end. Having buried his family, endured war and totalitarian regimes, survived an assassin's bullet, and lived with Parkinson's disease during his last years, he spoke about suffering with a credibility few could match. Evert recounts how he comforted the sick wherever he traveled and how, in his own decline, he refused to hide his weakness from the world, teaching by example how to suffer with dignity and trust. In his writings on suffering, the Pope explained that pain, when united to the Cross of Christ, is not meaningless but can become an offering that bears fruit for others. Evert also connects this love to the Pope's devotion to Divine Mercy and Saint Faustina, showing that the Cross and mercy were inseparable in his spirituality.

> *“Suffering is present in the world in order to release love.” — Salvifici Doloris, 29*
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> *“In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering...” — Salvifici Doloris, 18*