

JESUS
OVER

EVERY
THING

UNCOMPLICATING THE DAILY
STRUGGLE TO PUT JESUS FIRST

STUDY GUIDE | SIX SESSIONS

LISA WHITTLE



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

Jesus Over Everything Study Guide

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Introduction</i> | 5 |
| <i>How to Use This Guide</i> | 7 |
| | |
| Session 1: Putting God First | 9 |
| Session 2: Being Real | 31 |
| Session 3: Serving People | 51 |
| Session 4: Remembering What's True | 73 |
| Session 5: Changing Your Heart | 93 |
| Session 6: Walking It All Out | 115 |
| | |
| <i>Epilogue</i> | 137 |
| <i>Leader's Guide</i> | 139 |

INTRODUCTION

LET ME UNCOMPLICATE THIS FOR YOU

Do you ever struggle to put Jesus first? Do you ever feel like your life is over-complicated? For years, I've been listening to women who say they want to put Jesus first, but they're not sure what that looks like in their everyday life. These same women also readily admit their lives have become over-complicated and they're not sure how to uncomplicate them.

If you can say, "Yes and Amen!" to this, then I'm guessing the reason your life has gotten so complicated is because you have a mixed-up priority order. Believe me, friend, I've been there myself and didn't at first make the connection. That's why I want to help you uncomplicate your life. Not because you need to clean out your closets or throw your calendar out the window, but because we all—me included—keep operating with our mixed-up priority order, while at the same time asking Jesus to help us and bless us.

I'm a bottom-line person and here's the bottom line of this *Jesus Over Everything* study guide experience: Your life will be less complicated if you put Jesus first. Period. That's why we're going to face our "deadly overs" head-on: *over-doing*, *over-apologizing*, *over-explaining*, *over-indulging*, and *over-working*. Because these are some of the actions that lead to over-complicating our lives.

We're also going to look at the Jesus-first life and the better things it offers. After we see the choice, clearly, we will dive into four sessions that take us through the uncomplicating process (with lots of Bible teaching and practical application), and a last wrap-up session to give us final tools to equip and motivate us for the

Jesus-over-everything journey ahead. I have truly poured my heart into this study. To teach this timely word in a season when many of us feel the burden of personal unrest is a powerful gift that I believe will be a game changer.

If you're reading along in *Jesus Over Everything*, you will notice that the eight choice statements in the book—*real over pretty*, *love over judgment*, *holiness over freedom*, *service over spotlight*, *steady over hype*, *wisdom over knowledge*, *honesty over hiding*, *commitment over mood*—are broken down practically in each chapter to encourage new daily lifestyle choices. We'll use our time together during each study session to talk about how we learn to see the “Jesus over everything” decision each and every day, and how the Jesus over everything life is well within our reach with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus wouldn't have told us to put him first if he wasn't willing to help us with the execution of it in our daily life. In every way, he is the God who helps us. The good news I want you to hear right now and in each session is this: you can *absolutely* live this kind of life.

My hope is that *Jesus Over Everything* will have a deep and lasting impact for years because I'm living proof that the right priority order can change *everything* about our lives.

Lisa Whittle

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The *Jesus Over Everything* video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. Each session begins with a welcome section, several questions to get you thinking about the topic, and a reading from the Bible. You will then watch a teaching video and engage in some small-group discussion. You will close each session with a time of personal reflection and prayer as a group.

Each person in the group should have her own copy of this study guide and a Bible. Multiple translations will be used throughout the study, so whatever translation you have is fine. You are also encouraged to have a copy of the *Jesus Over Everything* book, as reading the book alongside the study will provide you with deeper insights and make the journey more meaningful. (See the “For Next Week” section at the end of each between-studies section for the chapters in the book that correspond to material you and your group are discussing.)

To get the most out of your group experience, keep the following points in mind. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of the teaching for the week, ask questions, and learn from others as you hear what God is doing in their lives. For this reason, it is important for you to be fully committed to the group and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members. If you choose to only go through the motions, or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you’re looking for during this study.

Second, remember the goal of your small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build intimacy and friendship. For this reason, seek to make your group a safe place. This means being honest about your thoughts and feelings, and listening carefully to everyone else's opinion. (If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of the book for leading a productive discussion group.)

Third, resist the temptation to fix a problem someone might be having or to correct her theology. Keep everything shared in your group confidential. This will foster a sense of community in your group and create a place where people can be challenged and grow spiritually.

Following your group time, there is personal study material to complete before you meet again. For each session, you may wish to complete the personal study all in one sitting or spread it out over a few days. If you are unable to finish (or even start!) your between-sessions personal study, you should still attend the group study video session. You are still wanted and welcome at the group even if you don't have your "homework" done.

SESSION ONE

PUTTING GOD FIRST

HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS, AND IN
HIM ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER.

COLOSSIANS 1:17 NIV

WELCOME

Leader, read aloud to the group.

Today we're talking about something beautiful and powerful: what it means to live a Jesus over everything kind of life. We'll explore the mindsets that often keep us from it and the complications we get into when we try to manage life on our own. We'll see through Scripture how a Jesus-first life is within our reach with the help of the Holy Spirit and encouragement from the Word. Remember: Jesus is willing to help us live this kind of life. It's not something we have to figure out all on our own. So, take a deep breath and let's get started with session one.

And just a helpful heads-up as we get started, this study guide experience isn't going to be about a long list of things to do, or a ton of hardcore spiritual excavation. It's going to be a journey to help you see the truth about what is complicating your life and how to uncomplicate it by putting Jesus first.

SHARE

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to kick things off, briefly discuss one of the following statements:

Share *one* word you would use to describe your life right now.

— or —

Name *one* area of your life you wish felt less chaotic.

READ

Invite someone to read aloud the following passage as “heart prep” for Lisa’s teaching. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then briefly discuss the questions that follow.

THE HEALING AT THE POOL

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?” “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well. (John 5:1–15 NIV)

What is one key insight that stands out to you from this passage?

Why do you think Jesus asks the man, “Do you want to get well?”

Consider as you listen to Lisa’s teaching, where you want freedom from complication and chaos in your life?

WATCH

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

NOTES

A simpler life

“THINGS IN OUR LIFE GET COMPLICATED OFTEN BEFORE WE KNOW IT. MOST OF US DON’T WILLFULLY CHOOSE IT; WE SILENTLY SLIDE INTO IT.”

The cycle of complication

1. We deflect

“EVERY TIME WE DEFLECT FROM THINGS WE NEED TO DEAL WITH, WE WITHHOLD OUR OWN HEALING.”

John 5: The Man at the Pool of Bethesda—“*Do you want to get well?*”

2. We overcompensate for a life we can't control

The deadly overs

“WE ARE UNDER A FALSE ASSUMPTION THAT THIS
OVERDOING IS IN SOME WAY PRODUCING THE HUMILITY
AND SELFLESSNESS WE CAN'T SEEM TO OTHERWISE FIND.”

3. We loathe our life and want to get a new one

“MOST OF US DON'T NEED A BRAND-NEW LIFE.
WE JUST NEED GOD TO RUN OURS.”

How to get things on the right track

1. Jesus is *for* us
2. Jesus being *first* is the only way our lives will work

Colossians 1:15–23

The “preeminence” of Christ is just a fancy way to say “*first place*” or “*first*.”

Do I truly believe _____?

The Lisa Whittle paraphrase of Colossians 1

- Look at all Jesus has done for you (verses 1–14).
- Remember who Jesus is (verses 15–22).
- And now, make him number one (verse 23).

The Jesus-over-everything lifestyle

Romans 5:5

Psalm 91:1

“PUTTING JESUS FIRST IS A CHOICE TO SIMPLIFY OUR LIVES AND HAND OURSELVES BACK OUR OWN SANITY.”

John 1:1

Life is Jesus. Jesus is life.

“The key to a beautiful life is not self-management; it is to put Jesus first over everything, where he belongs.”

DISCUSS

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. Name one thing that makes your life feel complicated right now:
2. According to Lisa, there are several ways we respond to the idea or concept of putting Jesus over everything in our lives. Which of the following do you resonate with the most and why? Share with the group.
 - I feel overwhelmed at the thought of putting Jesus first.
 - I feel guilty for not having put him first, before.
 - I long to have a less complicated life.
 - I long to live a life where Jesus is in charge and I'm good with it.
 - Jesus over everything sounds awesome, but I have no idea really how to do it.
3. Let's talk about the Cycle of Complication. In what areas of life do you *deflect* the most from things you need to deal with? Share one or two examples with the group. Discuss why deflection seems a better or more convenient solution to complication and yet often causes more complication. Would things change if you confronted and dealt with one of the areas you most deflect from?
4. How do we *overcompensate* for a life we can't control (i.e., *over-do*, *over-apologize*, *over-book*, *over-think*, *over-analyze*, *over-indulge*)? Discuss how this behavior keeps us from putting Jesus over anything. Discuss the irony and come up with 1–2 ways you can change your over-behaviors to allow Jesus' example and teaching to lead your reactions and responses.

5. Share your current priority list, honestly (rank 1–5). Does it feel like your priorities are working for you or against you? If you were to put God as a priority, describe how you think things would be different.

6. Share one word that would describe what it would feel like if you didn't have to over-manage your life anymore.

PRAY

Pray as a group before you close your time together. Use this space to keep track of prayer requests and group updates.

SESSION ONE

BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

This week, start your *Jesus Over Everything* personal study by spending some time with God each day. Reflect on the material you covered during your group time by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions exercises. At the start of the next session you will have a few minutes to share any insights you learned. But remember, the primary goal of these between-sessions exercises is for your own spiritual growth, not so you have the perfect answer for group discussion. And if you haven't done so already, let me encourage you to read chapter one of *Jesus Over Everything*.

WEEKLY REFLECTION: SESSION ONE

Before you begin the between-sessions exercises, briefly review your video notes for session one. In the space below, write down the most significant point you took away from this session's teaching.

Reflect on the word you chose at the end of the group session—the word that comes to mind when you think about not having to over-manage your life anymore. List 2–3 *specific* ways that word will influence your decisions and actions this week as you work toward putting Jesus over everything else.

DAY ONE: SHIFT YOUR FOCUS

In order to live the uncomplicated *Jesus Over Everything* life, we have to shift our focus from “ourselves first” to “Jesus foremost.” It’s that simple; yet, it’s something we don’t often do. But we can’t make this shift until we identify what we’re currently focused on.

First, let me explain what I mean by the word *focus* just so we’re all on the same page. When I talk about *focus*, I mean whatever it is that consumes us the most—our time, our attention, our thoughts, our actions, our words, our finances. Our focus is often what keeps us up at night, and what keeps us occupied throughout the day. Too much focus on anyone or anything but Jesus is what makes life more complicated than it needs to be. And if we try to uncomplicate our lives without the help of Jesus, we stay in the cycle of what I call the *deadly overs*, where we overdo it in key areas of our lives. So, first up: we’ve got to do a little digging out of the *deadly overs* in order to have an honest assessment of where our focus lies and where it needs to shift to Jesus.

Consider how the *deadly overs* complicate your life and consume your focus using the chart below. Fill in the blank boxes at the bottom with your own *deadly overs*. TAKE YOUR TIME going through this. It will likely take a few attempts to uncover your *deadly overs*.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: THE DEADLY OVERS

| MY DEADLY-OVERS | Real-life examples | What complication is this causing me? |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| over-doing | | |
| over-apologizing | | |
| over-explaining | | |
| over-analyzing | | |
| over-indulging | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Now, using the chart below, consider how the *Jesus overs* uncomplicate your life and help shift your focus. Fill in the blank boxes at the bottom with your own *Jesus overs*.

JESUS ASSESSMENT: THE JESUS OVERS

| THE JESUS OVERS | Real-life examples | How would this uncomplicate my life? |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Jesus over my prayer life | | |
| Jesus over my thoughts | | |
| Jesus over my words | | |
| Jesus over how I spend my time | | |
| Jesus over my relationships | | |
| Jesus over my sex life | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Read **Philippians 4:4–9**. List the seven attributes—or areas of focus—of the **Jesus-over-everything** kind of life mentioned by the apostle Paul in verse 8.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR BIBLE

COMMENTARY ON PHILIPPIANS 4:6–9

God needs not to be told our wants or desires; he knows them better than we do; but he will have us show that we value the mercy, and feel our dependence on him. The peace of God, the comfortable sense of being reconciled to God, and having a part in his favor, and the hope of the heavenly blessedness, are a greater good than can be fully expressed. This peace will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; it will keep us from sinning under troubles, and from sinking under them; keep us calm and with inward satisfaction. Believers are to get and to keep a good name; a name for good things with God and good men. We should walk in all the ways of virtue, and abide therein; then, whether our praise is of men or not, it will be of God. The apostle is for an example. His doctrine and life agreed together. The way to have the God of peace with us, is to keep close to our duty. All our privileges and salvation arise in the free mercy of God; yet the enjoyment of them depends on our sincere and holy conduct. These are works of God, pertaining to God, and to him only are they to be ascribed, and to no other, neither men, words, nor deeds.

—from *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*

- **Read:** Reread Philippians 4:4–6 and think deeply on the passage.
- **Look up:** Find the word *peace* in a concordance and explore other passages where this word also appears.
- **Explore:** Consider just how thorough and true this peace is that God is defining for us when we put Jesus over everything.

Take Action: Remember my “shopping fast” story? Yep, you know where this is headed. Consider fasting—or taking a break—from something this week that consumes your focus and contributes to a *deadly over* in your life. It can be shopping, or a few extra activities, or swapping out some Scripture meditation and breath work for the overthinking or overanalyzing you do on a regular basis. Or ask the Lord to help you be aware of over-apology and for a week work on saying only necessary, honest ones . . . or stop explaining yourself every time you feel misunderstood. The idea is to pick something that usually keeps you in an unhealthy cycle and commit to detox from it with God’s help this week.

THIS WEEK I WILL FAST FROM:

Pray: Take a few moments to reflect on your answers to the questions and invite God into the ways you want to uncomplicate your life.

DAY TWO: THE TWO-DEGREE DIFFERENCE

Often, when we think about the things we want to change in our lives, our impulse is to make big, drastic changes. We get an “all or nothing” mindset and think a 180-degree turn is what’s required, when most of the time it only takes a two-degree difference to set our lives on a different trajectory of choices. Just two degrees can be powerful and life-altering. The phrase, “two-degree difference,” is often used in science and psychology to describe slight changes that steer us in a new direction out of the course of catastrophe. For example, today we live nine-degrees away from the last ice age where no human life was viable. A slight two degrees in temperature moves us closer or further from a *significant* change in our climate.

While I don’t want to be overly dramatic about this concept, I think it’s helpful to be mindful of the fact that just because your life isn’t working now doesn’t mean you need to get a whole different life. Sometimes you just need to make a few small adjustments—the two-degree difference. My guess is most of us innately know when things are not working for us, but sometimes we just don’t know how to change . . . or we’re afraid of that change. As you answer the questions below, consider how a few small adjustments in your life could have great and significant impact on the change you desire and the life you long to live.

1. Briefly review your reflections from the last between-sessions exercise on the *deadly overs*. Which deadly over causes the most amount of pain, complication, or chaos for you?
2. When was the last time life seemed uncomplicated for you? List a few major markers of that time period that stand out as differences from how you are experiencing life today.
3. **Read Romans 5:1–5.** Not only do we have Jesus as the example of the way to live our lives, but we also have the Holy Spirit as our guide. How does this influence your perspective on the changes you need to make right now? Think about a specific way you can engage the Holy Spirit on a daily basis to alter one aspect of chaos or discord or complication in your life right now. Write a declaration statement to claim your commitment to letting the Holy Spirit take over whatever is most in need.

I WILL GIVE

TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AND TRUST HIS GUIDANCE.

4. How have you made matters worse by trying to do it all on your own? **Read Romans 8:26–27.** Consider where the Holy Spirit may be interceding on your behalf already. Describe specific circumstances where letting him lead you would uncomplicate your life right now.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR BIBLE

COMMENTARY ON ROMANS 5

This passage implies that we are at peace with God already (v. 1). With peace established, we now have access to God's presence. The wall of partition (or separation) has been removed. This peace is not a guarded truce subject to new warfare. It is a permanent peace. And the New Testament hope (v. 2) is the assurance of something not yet fully experienced, and quite different from uncertain, wishful thinking. That this hope will not be frustrated is guaranteed here and now by the love of God that the Holy Spirit pours into believers' hearts (vv. 4, 5).

—paraphrased from *New Geneva Study Bible*

- **Read:** Reread Romans 5:1–5 and think deeply on the passage.
- **Look up:** Find the words *Holy Spirit* in a concordance and explore other passages where the Holy Spirit appears as a guide.
- **Explore:** Now that we have access to God's presence through the Holy Spirit, consider what it means for you to have permanent peace and unwavering hope in Jesus.

5. **Read Psalm 91.** I'm a big believer in the idea that the best way to make change in our lives is to first find our strength and refuge in God. How does finding strength and refuge in God help to uncomplicate your life?

6. Do you find it difficult to connect your good and the glory of Jesus on a daily basis? If so, consider why and make note of it. If not, describe how you view your good as connected to Jesus' glory and what drives that perspective for you.

Take Action: I want you to seriously consider the changes you need to make in your life. Not just the big changes, but the small changes too—those changes that make a two-degree difference for you. And then I want you to start practicing a few of them this week. The point is not to feel more overwhelmed than you already do, or make life more complicated than it already seems. The point is to help you take baby steps toward uncomplicating your life as you learn to trust Jesus with the details of your life.

THE TWO-DEGREE DIFFERENCE I WANT TO MAKE THIS WEEK IS:

Pray: Take a few moments to reflect on your answers to the questions and your action step for this week as you invite God into the changes you want to make.

DAY THREE: FINDING HOPE IN JESUS FIRST

If you're reading along in the book, you find out in a story I tell that I do *not* do well with second place. I could tell you more about this, but what I'd rather talk about is how even those of us who might not consider ourselves competitive in nature struggle to be in the passenger seat of our lives.

Have you ever noticed how we tend to wait until things get complicated or chaotic before we reach out and ask God for help? Most of us beg God for help in the middle of a life with mixed-up priorities, and yet when we're finally willing to surrender and put God over all things, the complications seem to lessen and our lives are filled with hope. If only we could learn to do this on first-impulse every time our life gets complicated. And here's the secret of this session: *I think we can*. Remember the *Lisa Whittle paraphrase* of Colossians 1:15–23 from our teaching session? Just in case you don't, here it is: *Look at all Jesus has done for you; remember who Jesus is; now make him*

UNDERSTANDING YOUR BIBLE

WHAT DOES THE WORD COMMANDMENT MEAN?

In the original Greek, *commandment* means: An ordinance, injunction, command, law. I.e., an authoritative prescription.

ἐντολή / entolē

This word appears 67 times throughout the New Testament. It refers to commandment(s), instructions, orders, requirements.

—from Strong's 1785 and *NAS Exhaustive Concordance*

- **Read:** Also read Mark 12:28–34 and Deuteronomy 6:4–5.
- **Look up:** This original commandment from Deuteronomy 6 is considered the *Shema*. Do a little research on the *Shema* to see why and how often it was practiced in ancient Israel.
- **Explore:** Consider what it means for you to love God with all of your *heart, soul, mind, and strength*.

4. Which areas of your life are most noticeably different when you take Jesus' command literally? Think about your emotional, physical, and active states of being.

Emotional:

Physical:

GOING DEEPER (IF YOU WANT MORE)

Read Joshua 24. Up until this point in history, the Israelites were a promise-breaking group of people. And in this passage, we hear Joshua pleading with them to make a change—to take their spiritual lives in a new direction. Joshua recaps God’s goodness toward the Israelites and reminds them that the only way their lives would work from this point forward was to place their trust in God. My translation of this passage as it relates to our lives today: *Put Jesus first.*

Spend extra time in prayer today as you consider how Joshua’s message to the Israelites relates to your life and your situation today. Perhaps you need to be reminded of God’s goodness and remember the only way forward is to place your trust in God by putting Jesus first.

Use this space to jot down notes or thoughts as they come to mind.

For Next Week: Review chapter one in *Jesus Over Everything* and use the space below to write any insights or questions from your personal study that you want to discuss at the next group meeting. The teaching for session two comes from chapters two and seven in *Jesus Over Everything*.

EPILOGUE

Huge hugs and high fives . . . we did it, my friend. This has been a sweet Jesus-over-everything journey together. But the journey doesn't end here. This is the kind of journey you will travel every single day for the rest of your life as you choose time and again to put Jesus first. There will be hard days and days you are less successful, and initially, it may feel mostly uphill. But like with every practice, it will become more natural and, I pray over time, something you learn to love and live. There's no way around it: Jesus first *is* the way to the simpler life. Our impulse to run *from* Jesus because of sin and shame will eventually turn into a tendency to run *to* Jesus for reprieve from the complication, difficulty, and pain. The more we practice putting Jesus in first place, the more we do it out of healthy habit.

If you're struggling, please don't lose hope. Whether you're staring at the promised land, still deciding if you want to take possession, *or* struggling with the daily discipline to choose Jesus over everything time and time again, *God is with you*. He will never leave you nor forsake you, and *all* his promises are true.

Besides, your new beautiful reality is that now you have a community of friends who are on this journey with you. Lean on one another, encourage one another, challenge one another, and pray for one another. God never intended for us to live our wild, wonderful, holy lives alone. He created us in relationship with him *for* relationship with each other. If you're feeling hopeless, please share those feelings with Jesus, and then, if you feel so led, share them with a trusted friend. Get some sleep. And then start fresh with Jesus again tomorrow. Remember: until we go to heaven, this earthly Jesus-over-everything journey is daily and ongoing.

If you're doing well today, praise Jesus. Keep going. We never mature past a daily need for confession, repentance, and checking ourselves to make sure Jesus is at the top of the list.

And always know: Jesus stays ready and willing to uncomplicate our lives. If we will give him the priority he deserves, he will reorder our lives back to a place of simplicity. It is a choice for the very best life.

I love you. I love him most. Truly, he is everything.

Lisa

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

—EPHESIANS 3:20 NIV

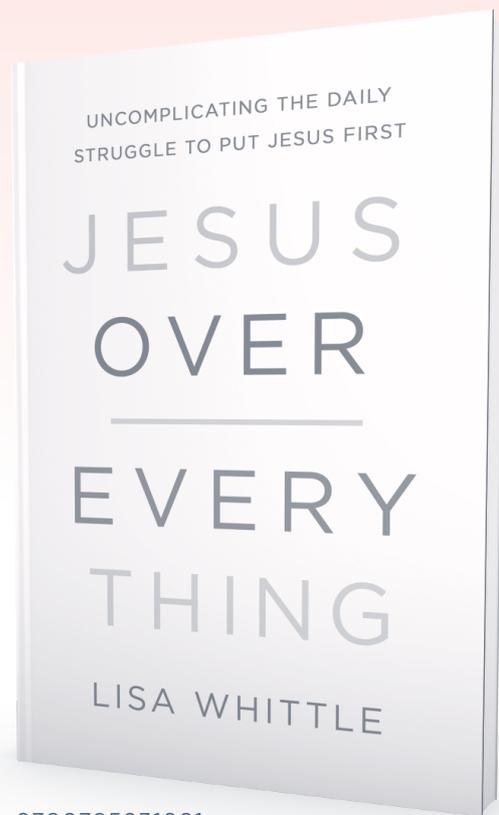
— MORE FROM —
LISA WHITTLE

**We all want to live simpler lives and to put Jesus first,
but we struggle with both.**

In *Jesus over Everything*, Bible teacher, author, and speaker

Lisa Whittle helps us fully engage in a life of uncomplicated, unwavering love for Jesus in a world that pulls us in every direction.

In a culture that carries the confusion of overindulgence, endless options, and influencer voices, *Jesus over Everything* is a practical, compelling call to discover the joy in giving God His rightful place in our everyday lives.



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