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# 8 Is Finally Enough

People always talk about that phone call, the one that changes everything. The one where you get the news that life as you've known it will never be the same again. One minute it's a normal day and suddenly a phone call brings heartbreak or elation.

For me, that phone call came April 20, 2005. In a conference room at the Florida Baptist Children's Home, I leaned against the wall next to my four brothers and listened to a judge talk to my parents and our adoption agent on speakerphone. Sitting across from us were Julia, 7, Tiana, 5, and Marissa, 4, siblings who were about to become my adopted sisters.

I remember thinking it felt strange and a bit unofficial to have a formal ceremony conducted over the phone, but after their years of hard work and signing documents, my parents were about to finally have daughters. Suddenly, the speakerphone boomed with a question for me and my brothers.

"And are you Howard boys ready for these girls to become a part of your family?" the judge asked. We all promptly responded in affirmation, but the milliseconds in between the question and my reply are frozen in my memory.

I wasn't ready for that question. Up to that

point, no one had asked me so directly. Yes, my parents had sat me down and asked me how I felt about three girls joining our family. But how can a child look their loving parents in the eye and refuse something so important to them? I wasn't sure how I felt. I certainly trusted my parents. They had never abused my trust in the past, and, at 12 years old, my life was pretty great.

My dad always jokes — it's only a joke because it didn't happen — that he wanted two or three kids. But when the first three all came out boys, my parents kept trying for a girl. My little brother, Jonathan, and I foiled their plans just like my older brothers before

us. After five straight, providence made my parents tap out from the old-fashioned way of growing a family.

So they looked into adoption. At first they just wanted one girl, but then they encountered three biracial sisters from Sarasota, Florida, with beautiful smiles and larger than life personalities. Regardless of how lovely they were, these girls were about to join a white, middle class family with five boys. There were bound to be growing pains.

Dinner table seating and temperament shifted. My brothers and I had to switch bedrooms. Barbies, hairbrushes and Hello Kitty backpacks were now scattered throughout the house. We got strange looks at the mall. Movie night selections shifted from “Remember the Titans” and “The Sandlot” to “Mean Girls” and “Perks of Being a Wallflower.” My dad swapped his sedan for a minivan. Holiday traditions were altered.

“Wow, five boys!” became, “Eight kids?” People still double-check their math when I talk about my family, “Wait, so you have seven siblings?”

It wasn't easy. I was often frustrated and I know my parents and brothers were too. Of course, no one had it harder than my sisters. Early on, the trials felt heavier than the benefits. But difficult seasons often yield beautiful fruit down the road. It's hard to imagine my family without my sisters. After more than a decade, the years before they arrived are a distant memory.

A life without them seems unfathomably boring to me now. How could I live without all their goofy nicknames and playful banter? Who would provide me with the latest celebrity scoop and release dates of Nicholas Sparks' movie adaptations? I'd have fewer handwritten birthday cards and likes on my Instagram posts. Of course, it'd be much qui-

eter around my parents' house when I came home, and I know I'd hate it.

If I could go back and answer that judge honestly, I'd respond to his question with an emphatic, “Absolutely not!” With so many things in life, no amount of planning can make us prepared for change. Leaning against that conference room wall, I was as ready as I was ever going to be. Things haven't been the same since that phone call. My life, as I knew it up to that point, was gone. I wouldn't want it any other way. ❁

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Zac Howard is a born and raised Floridian turned journalist in Manhattan. He's a proud FSU alum and recently finished his masters in journalism at NYU. When he's not writing, he enjoys watching sports, reading classic literature and shooting the breeze with old friends. More than anything, though, he wants to follow Jesus.

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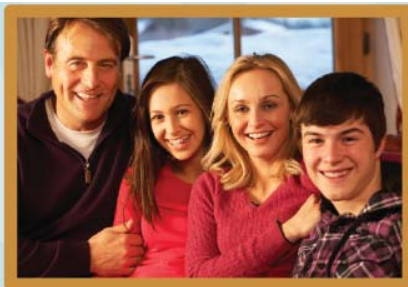
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