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**The Year of Surprise**  
2009 Offers Some Unexpected Lessons

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**What Happened:**

2009 was a year dominated by presidents and pop stars; loaded with Transformers and vampires; and when we said goodbye to Ted Kennedy, Farrah Fawcett and Michael Jackson. Most of all, it was the year of the big surprise.

Some of the surprises were good. No one expected much from 40-something Susan Boyle when she took the stage during “Britain’s Got Talent,” but her rendition of “I Dreamed a Dream” drew 120 million views on YouTube.com and helped her sell 1.8 million—and counting—copies of her debut album.

Some were the wrong sort of surprise. Tiger Woods’ previously pristine image took a mammoth blow after an early-morning crash ripped open Woods’ sordid private life. The revelations pushed Woods to take an indefinite leave from golf and may have destroyed his marriage.

In truth, most surprises aren’t surprises at all—at least to those doing the surprising. Boyle always knew she could sing; she just needed the rest of us to figure it out. Woods always knew his private antics could be trouble. He had hoped to keep them secret.

Nothing, of course, surprises God; but Boyle and Woods offer us some lessons on the subject of surprise: how to pave the way for the good kind, guard against the bad kind and handle the things that surprise us.

**Talk About It:**

**Patience:** In an age when most singing sensations are barely 20 when they’re first noticed, Boyle was 47. Do you sometimes feel as if you’ve waited a long time to be appreciated? For someone to notice you?

**Initiative:** Sometimes fear keeps us from surprising others. While Boyle sang at church, it took some serious courage for her to audition for a trio of critical judges, a huge studio audience and a massive television viewership. Have you ever kept a talent under wraps because you were too shy or afraid? Have you ever been afraid to say something to someone because you were worried about what he or she might think?

**Secrets:** Woods made some decisions that affected his marriage in pretty bad ways. How could he have avoided those problems? Should he have been more up front with his wife

about his struggles or sins earlier on? Do you think it might have helped? Could he have gotten some help?

**Expectations:** We all know life doesn't have a lot of certainty in it. Do you like surprises? What was the biggest good surprise you've ever received? What was the worst one? How did you deal with each?

**What the Bible Says:**

**Surprise**

"I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me" (Rom. 10:20).

**Patience**

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in His Word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning" (Ps. 130:5-6).

**Secret**

"Then he said to me, 'Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, "The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.'" He said also to me, 'You will see still greater abominations than these'" (Ez. 8:12-13).