I. **INTRO:**

A. God’s **sovereignty** & **providence** is seen in His control of **men** & **events**.

1. He does according to His **will** among the host of heaven & among the **inhabitants of the earth**; & none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” Dan 4:35 ESV

B. **Illustrations:**

1. **John Bunyan:** was drafted as a soldier in the civil war in England & was sent to take part in the siege of Leicester (Les-ter). As he was about to begin sentry duty 1 night, another requested that they exchange responsibilities. Bunyan agreed. That night the other soldier was shot in the head & died. Bunyan was spared so that in the providence of God he might minister through the written word to generations to come. *[wrote greatest allegory of all time, Pilgrim’s Progress]*

2. **William Cowper:** faced a great crisis. Tired of the struggle, he decided to take his own life, he took an overdose of **laudanum** *(potent narcotic, high morphine concentration)* but his suicide attempt failed. Then he tried to drown himself in Thames river, but he was prevented from doing so. The next morning he deliberately tried to impale himself on a knife, but the blade broke & he was only slightly injured. Then he tried to hang himself - & almost succeeded. Someone found him unconscious & cut him down. In despair he began reading Paul’s letter to the Romans & received strength to believe that God loved him. *[He became one of the most popular poets of the 18th century; Hymn: “There is a Fountain Filled W/Blood”]*

3. **Christopher Columbus:** felt greatly disheartened & discouraged after many attempts to obtain **financing** for a trip to **India**. While on way back to Italy he stopped 1 day at a convent not far from Granada & asked for a **drink of water**. The monk who gave him the water heard his story was the man who intervened on his behalf with Queen Isabella. Out of that request for a glass of water came the money to equip the vessels that ultimately crossed the Atlantic - that request led to the discovery of America.

4. **John Calvin:** was also **on his way to Italy** when he experienced God’s control of his path. In Italy he hoped to find freedom from Roman Catholic oppression & leisure to continue his writing. **The road was closed** because of the war between France & Italy, so he decided to make a detour through Geneva. There he met William Farel (not Will Ferrell), who with fiery eloquence demanded that Calvin stay in Switzerland. Impressed with Farel’s earnestness, Calvin complied, & the cause of the Reformation owes much to his decision.

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5. **Abraham Lincoln**: one day he was rummaging through a barrel of odds & ends, he came across a copy of *Lord Blackstone’s Commentaries* (on British jurisprudence). This “chance” discovery awakened his interest in law & human rights. As a result he ran for political office & eventually played a decisive role in the history of our country.

6. **George Whitefield**: was employed by his brother in the *Bell Inn* but could not get along with his brother’s wife, so he gave up his job & went to Bristol. Then step by step he went to Oxford, met with the Wesley’s, & developed a ministry that touched countless thousands of lives on both sides of the Atlantic. Whitefield was perhaps the greatest preacher of his time.

a) **Providence happens!** - A shift change at work; suicides overridden; a glass of water; a road detour; The effect of 1 book; dealing with a tough sister in law, each showing again that God’s Sovereignty is evidenced in His remarkable Providence!

b) These *seemingly* chance contacts & events have literally altered the course of history!

c) How encouraging for each of us to see God’s involvement in the seemingly *little things* in our lives also!

1. F.B. Meyer, “All these things, if carefully observed, yield their testimony & assurance that God is in all events permitting, directing, controlling, & causing all things to work out His perfect plan.”

2. The intertwining of events is like “a web of many threads, woven w/ marvelous skill; a network composed of all kinds of materials, great & small, but so arranged that the *very smallest* of them is as essential as the *largest* to the completeness of the fabric.” William Blaikie

II. **TALL, DARK, HANDSOME, & HUMBLE!**

A. **TALL, DARK, & HANDSOME!** (1,2)

B. (1) Saul’s dad *Kish* is a mighty man of power (wealth, valor). Distinguished for his affluence & influence, yet no hint of any spiritual aspirations.

C. (2) Saul (Shaw'-ool)- name means “asked for”, “desired”.

   1. At the time of our story Saul is 40 years old. He’s tall, dark, handsome.

D. **RUN AWAY DONKEYS!** (3,4)

E. (3) Donkey’s lost - So! Donkey’s were prized animals & used by royalty.

F. Arise, go, look! - These 3 commands set into motion a series of events that will eventually lead Saul to Samuel, who would anoint him as the first king of Israel.

   1. Kind of funny meeting Israel’s 1st king out **looking for donkey’s.**
H. (6-10) Up to this point Saul had been totally ignorant of Samuel’s existence until now.

1. This seems strange seeing that Samuel lived so close to Saul’s hometown & had been such a blessing on the nation.

2. Saul’s lack of awareness indicated that Kish & his family were entirely irreligious & totally immersed in their own pursuits.

3. How disappointing that the only reason they visited Samuel was to find their lost animals!
   a) People often “use” their religion to solve their problems & not to strengthen their character or overcome their sins.
   b) Nevertheless, God uses all of this to bring Saul to Samuel.
      (1) Faithfulness in a small task led Saul to a new friend, a new calling, & a new opportunity to serve God. (Warren Wiersbe)

I. (14) Perfect timing - they would have missed Samuel if they came to the gate a minute or 2 later. Let’s talk about the providential hand of God:

J. You don’t hear of any cities being named Providence anymore.

1. Providence R.I. - was 1st settled in June 1636 by Roger Williams, and was 1 of the first cities established in the U.S. & 1 of the original 13 Colonies. He named the area in honor of "God’s merciful Providence" which he believed was responsible for revealing such a haven for him & his followers to settle.

K. Providence = to see in advance or beforehand. It’s used to summarize God’s ongoing relationship to His creation.

1. 4 common errors regarding God & His relationship to creation:
   a) [1] Deism (God created the world & then essentially abandoned it); [2] Pantheism (creation doesn’t have a real, distinct existence in itself, but is only part of God); [3] Chance (or randomness); [4] Fate (impersonal determinism).

b) Big difference between the Providence of God & fortune, fate, or luck:
   (1) The key to this difference is found in the personal character of God:
      (a) Fortune is blind while God is all-seeing.
      (b) Fate is impersonal while God is a Father.
      (c) Luck is dumb while God can speak.
   (2) There are no blind, impersonal forces at work in human history. All is brought to pass by the invisible hand of Providence.

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2 Wayne Grudem: Systematic Theology; pg.315
3 R. C. Sproul; Essential Truths of The Christian Faith; pg.62.
R.C. Sproul, “There is no such thing as chance. Chance does not exist. It is merely a word we use to describe mathematical possibilities. But chance itself has no power because it has no being. Chance is not an entity that can influence reality. Chance is not a thing. It is nothing.”

c) Providence teaches: God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that He (1) keeps them existing & maintaining the properties with which he created them (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes. Or, Preservation, Concurrence, & Government.

(1) **Preservation** - Providence includes God’s work of sustaining His creation.

(2) **Concurrency** - We are creatures w/a will of our own. We make things happen. Yet the causal power we exert is secondary. God’s sovereign providence stands over & above our actions.
   (a) He works out His will through the actions of human wills, w/o violating the freedom of those human wills.
   (b) Clear example: in the case of Joseph & his brothers. Though his brothers incurred true guilt through their treachery against him, the providence of God was working even though their sin. Joseph said to his brothers, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”

(3) **Government** - He rules His creation w/absolute sovereignty & authority.
   (a) The earth is His ball, & He can take it & go home when He wants!
   (b) He governs everything that comes to pass, from the greatest to the least.
   (c) He makes the rain to fall & the sun to shine. He raises up kingdoms & brings them down. He numbers the hairs on our heads & the days of our life.

2. **Q:** How does this doctrine increase your trust in God?
3. **Q:** How will this changed the way you think about the future?
4. **Q:** Do you sometimes think of luck or chance as causing events that happen in your life? Does it increase or decrease your anxiety about the future?
5. **Q:** Do you see how little superstitions won’t prevent or bring good luck? Like, walking under a ladder; worrying when a black cat walks across your path; stepping on a crack in the sidewalk; or carrying a certain good luck charm?
6. In him (God) we live, move, & have our being. Acts 17:28
7. So God uses here, in our story: run away donkeys; young women fetching water; hurrying up; & right time/right place...for his glory!
L. **I AM THE SEER!** (15-20)

M. (15,16) Brief flashback - God had selected the king for his people. The day before he whispered into Samuel’s ear...vs.16.

N. (17) Samuel’s godward relationship was **remarkable**. His trust in the Lord **implicit**.
   1. After being **rejected** by the people (ch.8) he didn’t show any resentment when God told him about the man that would replace him as judge of the nation.
   2. Instead a readiness to further the plan & purpose of God.
   3. **Such obedience is both noteworthy & praiseworthy**!
   4. **Your response to your employer?** “I need to let you go, but before you leave I want you to train the new guy!”

O. (19,20) **I am the seer** - simple & direct.
   1. Without waiting for Saul to tell him of their errand or for the servant to offer him any money for his services, Samuel invited Saul to dine w/him & other hand-selected guests.
      a) **He promised** Saul that he’d **get home soon**;
      b) **He assured** Saul that he’d tell him **what’s on his mind**;
      c) **He informed** Saul that the **donkeys had been found**.
      d) Then, he gave him this **strange** statement, “And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on you and on all your father’s house?”

   (1) Samuel’s words were probably designed to arouse Saul’s **curiosity** & lead him into an ever-deepening understanding of himself & God’s purpose for him.

P. **HUMBLE BEGINNINGS!** (21)

Q. (21) Saul was not only **tall, dark, handsome**, but also **humble**! Humility was evident in his reply...
   1. But I'm of the **smallest of tribes? The least significant of families? Why me?**
   2. **No direct response**...giving him time to ponder his words!

R. **AT THE FEAST - SET APART!** (22-27)

S. (22-24) **At the Feast** - Saul seated in the place of honor.
   1. **The cook brought out the reserved thigh.** (right thigh reserved for priests, so most likely the left thigh) **Josephus** in his Antiquities of the Jews identified this piece of meat as the "royal portion".
T. Had Saul remained a **humble** servant, things would have been different in his life & in Israel. Read 1 Sam.15:17.

1. **Good beginnings are no guarantee of good endings!**
2. No man among bible men had **so many chances** thrust upon him to make a success of life, & no man ever **so missed them!**
3. We’ll see he not only missed great opportunities, he deliberately abused them.
4. His sun **rose** in splendor, but **set** in a tragic night.

He would never have let us get at the matchbox if He had **not** known that the framework of the universe is fireproof. - **James Russell Lowell**, quoted in *Herlooms*. 