

## A Sermon on the Games People Play

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for February 7th, 2021 (and beyond)

As much as I love the song "Games People Play" whether sung by Joe South, Waylon Jennings, or someone completely different, that's not what this sermon is about today. It is actually about the virtues you exercise and develop when playing games. Many multi-player board games and card games teach (require players to exercise due diligence to be successful to avoid penalty for violating the rules or if not diligent then not prepared to challenge more seasoned players who know the rules, exceptions, and more) patience and critical thinking. And, there are many legal or within the rules strategies that can be employed to optimize chances for success or "a win". In most games, if not all, chance also plays a role. With Scrabble you can focus on using the most letters you can each turn in hopes just by the numbers you deplete the bank of available letters reducing by that alone your opponents' chances of success while increasing your own. You can strategically place letters with a higher point value on squares that have a double or triple letter score. But, if you play a whole game with nothing but vowels, even after exchanging more than once, you aren't going to win no matter how well you play. Consonants really matter in Scrabble, though without the vowels may present a challenge.

With the card game Spades, here are the traditional rules: (source of quoted text: <https://bicyclecards.com/how-to-play/spades/> )

### "THE PACK

The standard 52-card pack is used.

### RANK OF SUITS

The spade suit is always trump.

### RANK OF CARDS

A (high), K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2.

### OBJECT OF THE GAME

To win at least the number of tricks bid.

### THE DEAL

The first dealer is chosen by a draw for high card, and thereafter the turn to deal proceeds clockwise. The entire deck is dealt one at a time, face down, beginning on the dealer's left. The players then pick up their cards and arrange them by suits.

### THE BIDDING

Each player decides how many tricks they will be able to take. The player to the dealer's left starts the bidding and, in turn, each player states how many tricks they expect to win. There is only one round of bidding, and the minimum bid is One. Every player must make a bid; no player may pass. No suit is named in the bid, for as the name of the game implies, spades are always trump.

## THE PLAY

The game is scored by hands, and the winner must make a certain number of points, which is decided before the game begins. Five hundred points is common, but 200 points is suitable for a short game. The player on the dealer's left makes the opening lead, and players must follow suit, if possible. If a player cannot follow suit, they may play a trump or discard. The trick is won by the player who plays the highest trump or if no trump was played, the player who played the highest card in the suit led. The player who wins the trick leads next. Play continues until none of the players have any cards left. Each hand is worth 13 tricks. Spades cannot be led unless played previously or player to lead has nothing but Spades in his hand.

## HOW TO KEEP SCORE

For making the contract (the number of tricks bid), the player scores 10 points for each trick bid, plus 1 point for each overtrick.

For example, if the player's bid is Seven and they make seven tricks, the score would be 70. If the bid was Five and the player won eight tricks, the score would be 53 points: 50 points for the bid, and 3 points for the three overtricks. In some games, overtricks are called "bags" and a deduction of 100 points is made every time a player accumulates 10 bags. Thus, the object is always to fulfill the bid exactly.

If the player "breaks contract," that is, if they take fewer than the number of tricks bid, the score is 0. For example, if a player bids Four and wins only three tricks, no points are awarded.

One of the players is the scorer and writes the bids down, so that during the play and for the scoring afterward, this information will be available to all the players. When a hand is over, the scores should be recorded next to the bids, and a running score should be kept so that players can readily see each other's total points. If there is a tie, then all players participate in one more round of play."

There is a scoring variant in tournament play where if you get 6 tricks over bid, you lose 60 points (or 10 points each), but, up to 5 over bid and you get an additional 1 point for each trick over bid plus 10 points for each trick you took up until reaching your bid.

"The additional tricks that were taken in an overbid situation are called sandbags, 1 additional trick is 1 sandbag. A team can accumulate 6 sandbags, but on the 6th Sandbag the team will be penalized 60 points. The sandbag count will be reset to zero. Exception: During the championship game (played to 500), the sandbag limit is ten. On the 10th sandbag, the team will be penalized 100 points." Source: <https://campusrec.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Spades-Rules.pdf>

The value of learning to play the game of Spades is that it is one way to learn about making and keeping promises in contracts with friends as well as testing your ability to correctly value/appraise your own holdings before bidding for any contracts

understanding in team play others may be impacted by your failure to assess the value of your own hand properly. In addition, as you can see by the rules above you can agree (verbal contract) with those you wish to play with before play begins on the variation of rules by which you will play. So, your ignorance of the game or game rules will be exposed as well as your potential assumption that all card games are the same so you should bluff like with Poker when playing Spades. You should not. If you are invited (expressly or impliedly) to play a game of Spades you can either assume the other players are telling you how to play correctly or take the time to read and understand the rules before you begin playing. You may also wish to understand if you agree to play that the other players assume you know the rules and how to play or would ask to see the rules with appreciation for those being patient with you as you learn to play. And, if you don't understand the rules and set fire to the deck of cards by throwing them in the fireplace then you will be asked to pay to replace the cards and may not be invited to play again.

As shown, unless all you have are Spades, and you are the first player, you have to play a club, diamond, or heart to start the game. Aces are high and the ace of spades beats all the other cards you could play in the game of Spades, so, whomever has that card knows to bid at least one trick at time of bidding and they'd be stupid as fuck to bid "Nil" if they held the Ace of Spades or what RuPaul refers to as definitely having an inner-saboteur or be a mole for another team intentionally trying to hurt competitors in a friendly tournament which seems absurd, though arguably something that could be a plot of an independent comedy. A "Nil" bid is another variable or rule that allows you to bid "nothing" and state you will get no tricks that hand. If you get nothing (no tricks), you actually get 100 points, but, that's a risk because other players may try to sabotage you by making you take a trick which would be nice if you bid anything in most cases and the worst if you bid "Nil" because then you lose 100 points from your score.

Philosophically, the game of Spades is interesting. In Tarot, clubs are wands or staffs (walking sticks), diamonds are disks or coins, hearts are cups, and spades are swords. In a friendly game, you don't draw your Sword first, you only introduce it when all else fails or you have nothing else to offer. And, you know what else is out there, right? So, if you start with nothing higher than a Jack of any suit, you may want to gamble with a "Nil" bid depending on entire hand. If it is the Jack of Spades though, you should likely at least bid one. And, it takes time to learn and get good at any game. So, where you play your first game and someone throws out a 2 of Spades and you bid "Nil" and the only Spade you have is the Jack, the other players can throw away a Spade just to make you lose your bid and 100 points if you bid "Nil" and took that trick because no one played anything higher than a Jack. Did I lose you?

The point is you either know already how to play Scrabble and Spades or you don't and if not, some of this sermon may be the same to you as reading about astrophysics or microbiology where people familiar with those subjects understand it but you don't because you haven't studied nor in any way familiarized yourself with those subjects. Those of us familiar with Scrabble, Spades, astrophysics, microbiology and any subject you could name understand our own references and often each other where we have familiarized ourselves with the subject matter. And, sometimes people don't make sense

because they are full of shit and when you check the veracity of their claims using the scientific method and common sense you find out they are unbelievable though may enjoy playing Poker or any game where bluffing is both expected and permitted. However, bluffing isn't the best way to win Poker, is it? Some players say you should bluff 40% of the time, some 10-15% of the time, and some say that 60% of their wins were bluffs. But, those are all tournament players who may wish to misguide anyone else considering entering a tournament that is not as skilled or seasoned in actual tournament play. In a country where everyone is equal, you may not wish to entrust your future to your competition's advice and if you need the advice they don't consider you competition. If good natured, they may hope to help you succeed too and if of bad faith will exploit you in some way and laugh at the fact you seem to need to learn "the hard way".

But, playing board games and card games that have stood the test of time is a good idea regardless of your age. They've stood the test of time because they are educational, require skills you develop over time, and help with patience and grace (i.e. good sportsmanship). Card games such as Spades help with building math skills and appraisal skills including estimation and arithmetic. Scrabble has time restrictions on making your play and penalties for playing words not found in the dictionary so helps with vocabulary which should grow over time as you become familiar with new subjects as a lifelong learner. It also provides opportunity for other players to extend the time limit out of courtesy or say #TimesUp if the mini-hourglass timer runs out forcing a pass or forfeited turn.

Video games where it is mostly single player, you don't have to have patience with anyone but yourself and the game itself. And, you don't have to have patience with either of those if you want to destroy one or both. I challenge you to join Pogo.com or some other site where you can play Scrabble, Hearts, Spades, and more against other human players whether your friends or strangers (possibly in nursing homes) and see if it helps you with patience, sportsmanship, and developing or enhancing your graciousness. Or, if you want to slow the game down more for the sake of building patience and play in person with physical cards, boards, and pieces, and a human assigned to keep score rather than Pogo.com or some electronic version, that's awesome too. I think the person who exhibits the best sportsmanship wins even if they didn't win the game. They win the only game that really matters which is the game that determines who is best at practicing Truth and all the Virtues on any given Sunday. It is God's day off, so, step it up. God holds the title the other six days of the week in perpetuity and likely Sunday too. Good Sportsmanship is one of the elements of God's Grace. If you've ever played with a poor sport, you likely agree and need no other evidence. If you are the poor sport, there are ways for you to learn patience but it requires self-discipline, are you up for that challenge? #QuestionMore.

If you understood this sermon in entirety, please imagine for a moment reading it without having any knowledge or experience in the games of Scrabble and Spades. How much of it would you have understood if never introduced to a standard deck of playing cards?

If you didn't understand this sermon in whole or in part, are you willing to learn and did you click any of the links in the sermon to learn more or did you tell yourself "it was stupid" to project your own ignorance onto the sermonizer or sermon itself? If the latter, you are a malignant narcissist and are welcome to provide feedback. All are invited to do so. Let's talk.

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

For More About COPE and the HEAL Mission, see:

<https://www.cope.church> and <https://www.heal-online.org>