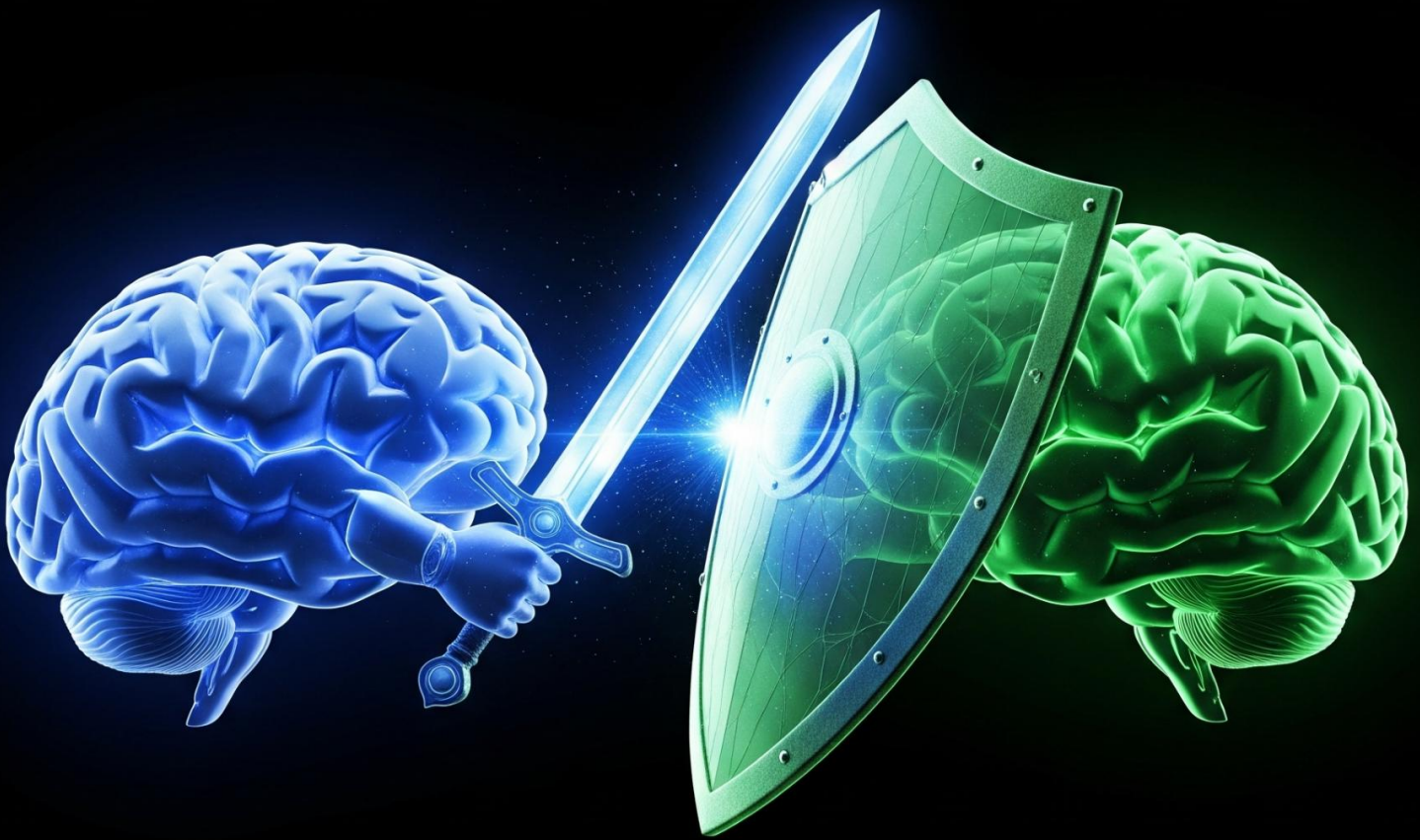


DOES YOUR NEURODIVERSE RELATIONSHIP FEEL LIKE IT IS IN ENEMY MODE?

Based on the Book: *Escaping Enemy Mode: How Our
Brains Unite or Divide Us* by Wilder & Woolridge



Workbook for Individual or Group Coaching
by Rev. Dan Holmes & Rev. Dr. Stephanie C. Holmes



Introduction: Welcome to Escaping Enemy Mode!

Before we get started in the workbook, whether in one-on-one coaching or doing this as a group, it is important to note that you will only get out of the book/workbook and class what you are willing to put into it.

Class Expectations/ 1 on 1 Expectations:

If your coach uses this material for you one-on-one or in a group, you are expected to be prepared for focused discussion before your session. First, read the chapter assigned. Second, do the assigned pages in the workbook, and third, watch the video that goes with the session. There may be recommended podcasts, but those are not required.

This class is about you. We hope and believe that each spouse/partner is working on themselves and building resiliency, which can positively impact your marriage. The focus of this time and reading/workbook is your own emotional and spiritual resiliency and growth.

Whether or not your spouse is willing to do their work, learning about your own defense and survival mechanisms, and when YOU are in enemy mode, can help you! You can be in enemy mode and not even know it!

For Those of You in a Group: Things to Remember

1. **Attendance is important.** Perhaps you may not think that your presence is valuable to the group; however, as the group(s) forms, your presence is important not only for yourself but for the group. Your insights or new actions may be the thing that encourages, inspires, or helps another member.
2. **Confidentiality & Privacy:** While this is not a therapy group, it happens from time to time that some may know each other or have a shared circle. Please respect the privacy and confidentiality of the group.
3. **Group fees are non-refundable.** Taking a spot means someone else did not get a spot in the group.
4. **Preparation:** Life gets busy, but building resiliency, emotional regulation, and getting to know your brain is an active and intentional activity. Please do the assignments and be prepared to share with the camera on if possible.
5. In Consideration of the Group, sometimes it happens you may not be able to be in a private place in your home; however, **walking or driving, or being in a noisy space, is a distraction for the group.** If you are driving, please focus on your driving and be prepared to listen only with the camera off (although we do not recommend being the

driver and attending class). If you are walking on a treadmill or outdoors, please do not have a camera on. Also, some group members struggle with vertigo, and having a ceiling fan on can trigger vertigo. Please turn your ceiling fan off. We recommend a quiet, private space with a good Wi-Fi or hotspot connection for a better experience for you and the group.

6. **Refrain from giving advice:** It is okay to talk about things that have worked or not worked for you or things you have tried, but please refrain from giving marital advice to other members.
7. **No judgment zone:** There are group members in various places in marriage, from in-home separation, out-of-home separation and those considering the next steps, perhaps even divorce. Every situation is different, and we welcome those in various stages or phases of their relationship, accepting them where they are in their relationship at the moment.

Transformation Can Happen in Groups! Building Group Identity and Healthy Course Correction

Author: Rev. Dr. Stephanie Holmes

As you may have heard on our podcasts, we follow Dr. Wilder and have talked about Christian transformation happening with joy, hesed (attachment), group identity, and healthy correction. This is why we provide options and opportunities through us, and other coaches.

Why Groups?

In today's fast-paced and competitive world, personal and professional development has become crucial for individuals seeking growth and success. While individual coaching is a popular approach, group coaching offers a unique and effective alternative.

Group coaching brings together a small group of individuals with similar goals, led by a skilled coach in that area.

Group Coaching and Group Identity:

1. **Building Group Identity with Hesed (Attachment and Peer Support):** One of the significant advantages of group coaching is the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals who share similar aspirations and challenges in a unique situation. Being part of a supportive community offers a sense of belonging, encouragement, and shared accountability. The diverse perspectives and experiences within the group can provide fresh insights, novel approaches, and innovative solutions to the problems faced by individuals. Groups combine aspects of neurodiversity and faith, which is hard to come by in combination for many!
2. **Enhanced Self-Awareness:** Group coaching provides a reflective and introspective space for self-exploration. Through active participation in group discussions and activities, individuals gain insights into their own strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs. Hearing others share their experiences and challenges can serve as a mirror, enabling individuals to gain a deeper understanding of themselves. The collective wisdom and feedback from the group facilitates personal growth and self-awareness, leading to improved decision-making, self-confidence, and self-acceptance.
3. **Multiple Perspectives and Learning Opportunities:** The diverse composition of a coaching group offers a rich tapestry of perspectives and experiences. Each

individual brings unique insights and knowledge, which creates a valuable learning environment. The group dynamics encourage active listening, empathy, and open-mindedness, fostering an environment conducive to personal and professional growth. Members can learn from each other's successes, failures, and lessons learned. This multifaceted learning experience broadens horizons, expands perspectives, and enhances problem-solving skills.

4. **Cost-Effective and Time-Efficient:** Group coaching often proves to be a more cost-effective option compared to individual coaching sessions. By sharing the coach's time and expertise with others, the cost per participant is significantly reduced. Additionally, group coaching allows individuals to benefit from collective wisdom and support without compromising the quality of the coaching experience. This affordability makes group coaching accessible to a wider range of individuals, ensuring that personal and professional development is not restricted to those with substantial financial resources. Furthermore, group coaching sessions are scheduled at regular intervals, which can be more manageable and time-efficient than arranging individual coaching sessions.

Let's Get Started!

Introduction: Our Correspondence with Dr. Wilder

Welcome to Escaping Enemy Mode, based on the material by Wilder & Woolridge.

We want to take this time to share our heart and goals for choosing this book in our work with NeuroDiverse Christian Couples. When Dr. Stephanie read the book as a previewer for Dr. Wilder, she saw many parallels in what she and Dan see in ND marriages, yet ND marriage is not mentioned in the book at all. Dr. Holmes upon reading the neuroscience and circuitry involved in “enemy mode” reached out to one of the authors, Dr. Wilder and asked the following:

Email 1:

Dr. Wilder,

Thanks so much for the book *Escaping Enemy Mode*. I am already knee deep in it.

I know your ministry focuses on restoring whole brain health and relational community but as I am reading about the importance of posterior cingulate cortex and the right cingulate cortex and right orbital prefrontal cortex to enemy mode, I wonder if someone has damaged or not a fully developed PCC or damage or imbalance in the orbital amygdala circuit would or could this person be stuck in enemy mode?

The book is focused of course on a normal or neuro-typical brain and how one can slip into enemy mode and a great explanation of the three levels here but if there are key issues in the brain here can a person be stuck here are their implications what to do if one's brain's development is stuck in enemy mode because of how the brain is wired, particularly is someone on the autism spectrum or has traits of autism spectrum?

Blessings,

Dr. Stephanie Holmes

Dr. Wilder's response:

Hi Dr. Holmes,

You are right that people with any kind of disturbance in the development of posterior cingulate, amygdala, or PFC are going to be very easily dragged into enemy mode. Autism spectrum is at high risk of overloading the posterior cingulate with even "normal" intensity input. That is the key issue as you suspect.

Blessings,

Jim

Email 2 to Dr. Wilder:

Dan asked some questions for his study of the books *Rare Leadership* and *Other Half of Church* (also Wilder's materials)

Dr. Wilder's response:

Hi Dr. Holmes,

Good to hear from you that you continue processing the books' contents.

Dan's question about what could pass for good executive functioning points mostly to the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex with the as-if self-capacity. It can be distinguished by its lack of real-time awareness of the person's body sensations, a slowing of the dominant frequency of that region below 10Hz, and/or diminished compassion as felt in the body - abdomen in particular.

He is also correct that the right prefrontal cortex is unique in that it retains fetal biochemistry across the lifetime - therefore increased neuroplasticity.

Most men find it difficult to achieve any degree of self-awareness during eye contact under heightened affect. Most must look up and to the left to regain self-awareness. This appears to be heightened for men along the spectrum. This is further aggravated when women miss the overwhelm cues and when people attempt to convey importance by intensifying the interaction (very, very common.)

Conscious disambiguation along with conditional statements are highly dependent upon shared meaning. The brain is almost always operating as meaning in search of words. Shared meaning is very dependent upon processes that are dominant in the right brain.

Loss of shared meaning in the right brain leaves the word based conscious process overly focused on detail.

If the spouse of someone on the spectrum has had previous life experiences with dismissive attachment people or people who are frequently in simple or intelligent enemy mode then their minds will likely interpret the disconnection with their spouse as a lack of attachment or of enemy mode.

I hope that clarifies a bit. It is good to hear that you are finding uses for this material within your work and conversations.

Blessings,

Jim

With this clarity of information from the author, we wanted to this group coaching style course to help men and women in an ND Christian marriage to examine their hearts and minds and do their personal work to escape enemy mode. In marriages where AS traits or Neurodiversity has gone undiagnosed for years, there are years of negative cycles and patterns within the couple, but the true change in the relationship will come when each person asks the Holy Spirit to help them see themselves and their contributions to enemy mode cycles and be willing to the work to change their heart and mindsets and be willing to examine themselves.

This course will not change one's neurodiversity or automatically change brain wiring. What is empowering and hope-giving is that we can all learn to turn our relational circuits on and be aware when we are being dragged into enemy mode and can be willing to hear feedback from our spouse when it feels like enemy mode is on and relational circuits are off.

Overview of the Material

Enemy Mode by Jim Wilder and Ray Woolridge explores a fascinating and deeply human phenomenon—how our brains can shift into a defensive state where we perceive others as threats, even when they're not. This "enemy mode" hijacks our ability to connect, empathize, and relate, replacing curiosity and compassion with suspicion, blame, or emotional shutdown. Wilder's insights draw from neuroscience, psychology, and relational theology to help people recognize when they're in enemy mode and, more importantly, how to get out of it.

When applying the core ideas of *Enemy Mode* to neurodiverse couples, where one or both partners may be neurodivergent (such as autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, etc.), the concept becomes even more crucial and nuanced. Neurodiverse couples often navigate a landscape filled with communication differences, sensory sensitivities, and contrasting emotional processing styles. These differences, while offering rich potential for unique bonds and understanding, can also unintentionally trigger enemy mode responses far more frequently if left unrecognized.

At its heart, *Enemy Mode* is not about labeling people as "bad" when they react defensively. Instead, Wilder describes enemy mode as a brain state, a survival mechanism. The brain, perceiving discomfort, misunderstanding, or emotional overwhelm, flips into a mode where it treats the other person as an adversary. This can manifest in three primary ways, as Wilder outlines:

1. **Simple Enemy Mode** – A reactive state where someone instinctively avoids or dismisses another person without much thought.
2. **Stupid Enemy Mode** – When a person actively works against someone else, saying or doing harmful things they may regret later.
3. **Intelligent Enemy Mode** – A more calculated version where someone strategically positions themselves against another, often justifying their stance.

For neurodiverse couples, the triggers into these modes might not be typical. A neurodivergent partner might experience sensory overload, misinterpret social cues, or need more processing time, each of which could be misread by a neurotypical partner as disinterest, coldness, or defiance. Conversely, a neurotypical partner's push for immediate emotional responses or certain social expectations might feel overwhelming or unsafe to the neurodivergent partner, leading to withdrawal or shutdown, classic signs of enemy mode.

Communication breakdowns in these relationships are often not due to a lack of love or commitment, but because both partners' brains are slipping into protective states without realizing it. Wilder emphasizes that enemy mode isn't about *willful* hostility—it's about the brain prioritizing safety over connection. In neurodiverse dynamics, where processing styles, emotional regulation, and sensory experiences differ, the likelihood of these protective brain states being triggered can increase if there isn't mutual understanding.

For example, imagine an autistic partner needing solitude after a long day due to sensory fatigue. The neurotypical partner, craving connection, might perceive this as rejection. Feeling hurt, they could slip into simple or stupid enemy mode, perhaps making a passive-aggressive comment or withdrawing affection. The autistic partner, sensing tension without fully grasping the cause, might further retreat, escalating the disconnect. Both partners are now in enemy mode, seeing each other through a lens of “you’re not safe” or “you don’t understand me.”

Wilder’s work offers a powerful framework for recognizing these moments, not as failures, but as signals. The key is *awareness*—learning to spot when enemy mode has taken over and developing practices to shift back into relational mode, where empathy, curiosity, and connection can thrive again.

For neurodiverse couples, applying *Enemy Mode* starts with accepting that their brains might interpret situations differently and that’s okay. The goal isn’t to eliminate differences but to build “relational circuits” strong enough to handle them without flipping into defense. Wilder talks about the importance of “joy bonds” relational connections built on shared joy and the sense that “we’re glad to be together.” For neurodiverse couples, intentionally creating these moments of mutual delight can serve as a buffer against the automatic slide into enemy mode.

Another critical application is developing *repair strategies*. Since enemy mode is inevitable in any relationship, especially where neurodiversity adds layers of complexity, what matters is how quickly couples can recognize it and return to connection. Wilder encourages practices like:

- **Naming the State:** Simply acknowledging, “I think I’m in enemy mode right now,” can diffuse tension and invite compassion.
- **Building Quiet Spaces:** For neurodivergent partners who may need downtime to process, creating agreed-upon signals or routines can prevent misunderstandings.
- **Curiosity Over Assumption:** Both partners practice the habit of asking, “What’s really going on for you right now?” rather than assuming intent.
- **Regulating Together:** Co-regulation techniques—like breathing exercises, grounding practices, or simply sitting in silence—can help both partners reset their nervous systems.

Wilder also highlights the role of community in helping individuals stay out of enemy mode. For neurodiverse couples, this could mean engaging with supportive networks, whether that's therapy attuned to neurodiversity, peer groups, or trusted friends who understand the unique dynamics at play. When couples feel seen and supported outside their relationship, they're less likely to perceive each other as threats within it.

Enemy Mode offers neurodiverse couples a compassionate lens to view their relational challenges, not as personal shortcomings but as natural brain responses to stress, difference, and misunderstanding. By learning to recognize these brain states, honoring each other's neurological wiring, and cultivating habits that foster connection over defense, couples can transform moments of disconnection into opportunities for deeper understanding.

This approach doesn't promise a conflict-free relationship—no such thing exists. But it does offer hope: the ability to move from cycles of misinterpretation and defensiveness toward a relational space where both partners feel safe, valued, and genuinely connected. For neurodiverse couples, embracing Wilder's insights means turning what could be seen as "difficult differences" into doorways for growth, resilience, and joy.



Reflection Question

As you read this introduction, or perhaps have watched the video, or read the chapters for this lesson, the term ENEMY Mode? What image/images are provoked for you? Has your spouse ever said, "You treat me like an adversary or enemy?" Do you persistently "feel" attacked?

Session 1

Enemy Mode in Daily Life & 3 Types of Enemy Mode

Read: Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2

Workbook Section: Recognizing Enemy Mode in Neurodiverse Marriage

Based on Jim Wilder's Enemy Mode (Intro, Chapters 1-2)

1. Key Insight: What is Enemy Mode?

"Enemy mode is not just about open conflict—it's when our brain shifts from connection to protection, seeing even those we love as obstacles or threats."

— Jim Wilder (paraphrased)

In a neurodiverse marriage, misunderstandings, sensory overload, or differences in emotional expression can unintentionally trigger enemy mode. Recognizing when this shift happens is the first step toward restoring connection.



Reflection Question

Can you recognize when you are in enemy mode? Can you recognize when you are in relationship mode? Can you recognize when you are dysregulated?

2. Core Themes to Reflect On

- Misunderstandings Aren't Malice:
Many enemy mode reactions in neurodiverse marriages begin with innocent misattunements, not intentional harm.

- Brains That Process Differently Trigger Differently:
What feels like disconnection to one spouse may be a coping mechanism for the other.
- Enemy Mode is a Brain State, not a Heart Problem, BUT if you do not heed the harm caused or refuse to learn yourself and turn your Relational Circuits, you can become hard-hearted!
The goal isn't blame—but awareness, so you can return to relational safety.



Reflection Question

How often are you and your spouse in disagreement? Do you perceive misunderstandings or disagreement, or different perspectives as a threat? Do you perceive that your spouse sees a disagreement or different perspective as a threat?

3. Self-Reflection Exercise/ Group Discussion

How Does Enemy Mode Look for You?

When I slip into enemy mode, I tend to:

- ☐ Withdraw / Shut down
- ☐ Get defensive or argumentative
- ☐ Over-explain or become overly logical
- ☐ Experience emotional overwhelm
- ☐ Other: _____



Reflection Question

What Typically Triggers This?

List 2-3 common scenarios in your marriage where you notice enemy mode creeping in.
(*Example: When plans change suddenly, when I feel unheard, when my sensory limits are pushed, when my spouse withdraws or I perceive rejection, etc.*)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

4. Couple Discussion Prompt

- How does enemy mode show up for each of you?
- Are there times when one of you thought the other was being "cold" or "attacking," but in hindsight, it was either enemy mode or a neurodivergent coping behavior?



Growth Tip

Focus on *understanding*, not *fixing*.

If you are not curious or open, this is a sign you are potentially in enemy mode.

5. Group Coaching Discussion Questions

1. Recognizing Patterns

- *What are some unique ways enemy mode appears in neurodiverse marriages compared to neurotypical ones?*

2. Coping vs. Conflict

- *How can we better distinguish between a spouse's coping mechanism and true adversarial behavior? What are ways to put up a boundary when one feels under attack or pressure?*

3. Breaking the Cycle

- *What has helped you (or could help you) "exit" enemy mode faster when misunderstandings happen?*

4. Creating Safety

- *What relational habits could we build to reduce how often enemy mode gets triggered?
(Think: planned check-ins, clarifying questions, sensory breaks, etc.)*

5. Faith Perspective

- *How does viewing enemy mode as a brain state, rather than a moral failing, change how we offer grace to ourselves and our spouse? Where it can become a heart issue is refusal to work on it or refusal to learn new strategies (then it may become a character issue).*
- *How can prayer or spiritual practices help us return to a relational mindset?*

- *What are your quieting/regulation methods?*
- *Do you practice appreciations/gratitude?*

6. Practical Application: Your "Enemy Mode Reset Plan"

As a couple, draft a simple plan:

- **Signal:**
What's a safe, non-blaming way to signal, *"I think we're in enemy mode"*?
(*Example: A code word, gesture, or phrase like "Pause for Connection."*)
- **Step Back:**
What helps each of you calm your brain and re-engage relationally?
(*Example: 15-minute break, deep breathing, sensory regulation, short prayer.*)
- **Reconnect:**
What phrase or action reassures your spouse you're back in "ally mode" or your relational circuits are back on?
(*Example: "I'm for you, not against you."*)



SOAP Method

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

— Proverbs 15:1

S (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

O (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage?)

A (Application, How does this apply to you?)

P (Write a prayer, personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)



Personal Reflection

Identify a Recent Challenge. How did you respond? What emotions did you experience? Were you able to get out of enemy mode?



Personal Reflection

How can this Biblical wisdom guide us when enemy mode tempts us to escalate?

Next Steps:

For the next week, observe when enemy mode shows up in your interactions.

- Journal what triggered it.
- Practice using your reset plan.
- Be ready to share insights at the next session.



After Group Coaching Reflection

What is something I took away from group or my coaching session? Is there something someone said that resonated or something new for me to ponder or invite Jesus into to examine a blind spot or growth area?

Session 2

Chapter 3 Simple Enemy Mode

Recognizing and Overcoming Simple Enemy Mode in Neurodiverse, Faith-Based Marriages

Theme:

Understanding how Simple Enemy Mode can quietly enter our marriages especially when neurodiversity leads to misunderstandings and how faith and grace can guide us back to connection.

In neurodiverse marriages, partners may experience moments where differences in communication, emotional processing, or sensory needs trigger disconnection. Dr. Wilder describes Simple Enemy Mode as those times when, without deep thought, we begin to treat someone we love as if they are a problem to avoid or fix, rather than a person to connect with.

For neurodiverse couples, this can happen easily when one partner misunderstands the other's intentions, tone, or behavior. The good news? Awareness and faith can help us shift back to relational living.



Group Reflection Question

1. Recognizing Simple Enemy Mode:

Can you recall a recent moment when you "shut down" relationally with your spouse, not out of anger, but simply because you saw them as an obstacle or source of discomfort?

(Describe the situation. What triggered it?) If you begin to dysregulate while you write- pause- breathe- what is still triggering you about the event?

2. Neurodiverse Dynamics:

- How do differences in how you and your spouse process emotions, tasks, or social situations contribute to moments where Simple Enemy Mode appears?
- Are there specific patterns (e.g., sensory overload, misread cues, need for routine) that tend to spark disconnection?

3. Repair and Reconnection:

- What helps you "wake up" from Simple Enemy Mode and return to seeing your spouse as your beloved, not your problem?
- Are there faith practices (prayer, breathing, gratitude, scripture) that could serve as cues to reconnect?

Practical Exercise:

"Pause and Pray" Reconnection Practice

Next time you notice signs of Simple Enemy Mode (e.g., avoidance, annoyance, emotional shutdown), try this:

1. Pause – Take a breath and step away mentally for just a moment.
2. Pray – Silently pray:
“Lord, help me see my spouse through Your eyes. Give me patience and love to stay connected.” Ask Jesus to show you how HE sees your spouse right now or give you an appreciation for them right now.
3. Re-Engage – Look for one small way to show warmth—eye contact, gentle touch, or kind words.

Write about how this practice goes over the next week. What did you notice about your reactions and your connection afterward?



Discussion Prompt

For Your Consideration if Safe to Engage As a Couple

- How can we, as a couple, create a shared language or signal to gently alert each other when one of us might be slipping into Simple Enemy Mode?

- How does understanding neurodiversity help us offer grace rather than judgment in those moments?



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Ephesians 4:2-3 (NIV)

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

S (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

O (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage?)

A (Application, How does this apply to you?)

Prayer (Write a prayer, personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)



Personal Reflection

Identify a Recent Challenge. How did you respond? What emotions did you experience? Were you able to get out of enemy mode?



Reflection Question

How can this Biblical wisdom guide us when enemy mode tempts us to escalate?



After Group Coaching Reflection

What is something I took away from group or my coaching session? Is there something someone said that resonated or something new for me to ponder or invite Jesus into to examine a blind spot or growth area?

Session 3

Read Chapter 4: Stupid Enemy Mode

Workbook Section: Recognizing and Escaping Stupid Enemy Mode

Based on Chapter 4 of Enemy Mode by Dr. Jim Wilder

Applied to Neurodiverse Couples

Introduction: What is Stupid Enemy Mode?

In Chapter 4 of *Enemy Mode*, Dr. Jim Wilder introduces us to Stupid Enemy Mode a brain state where we not only see others as threats but actively start working against them. Unlike Simple Enemy Mode, where we disengage or avoid, Stupid Enemy Mode fuels us to say or do things that hurt relationships, often things we later regret. It's called "stupid" because our relational brain shuts down, and we act without wisdom, empathy, or foresight.

For neurodiverse couples, this can be especially destructive because many conflicts stem not from malice but from misunderstanding, sensory overload, communication mismatches, or emotional dysregulation. When one or both partners slip into Stupid Enemy Mode, minor disagreements can escalate quickly into hurtful words, shutdowns, or emotional withdrawal. Words do hurt and are often remembered, causing emotional wounds and scars.

Understanding this mode and learning how to *recognize and process the emotions that fuel it* is essential for protecting the relationship and fostering connection even in tense moments.

The Role of Big Emotions in Stupid Enemy Mode

Dr. Wilder points out that Stupid Enemy Mode is often triggered by unprocessed big emotions. When emotions overwhelm us, and we lack the skills to process them, our brain defaults to treating the people closest to us, often our spouse, as the enemy.

This is where the concept of the Big 6 Emotions comes in, drawn from Dr. Marcus Warner, Chris Coursey and Dr. Jim Wilder's work on emotional resilience:

The Big 6 Emotions:

1. Sadness
2. Anger
3. Fear
4. Shame
5. Disgust
6. Hopeless Despair

These six emotions are universal and unavoidable. They aren't *bad*—they are signals designed to alert us that something isn't right and that we need care, connection, or correction. But when ignored, suppressed, or misunderstood, these emotions can flood us and push us straight into enemy mode. This can be especially problematic if you experience alexithymia (the inability to articulate in words or names one's emotions in the moment).

For neurodiverse couples, emotional processing can look very different between partners:

- A neurodivergent partner might *internalize* emotions, leading to shutdowns or meltdowns later.
- A neurotypical partner might *externalize* emotions, seeking immediate discussion or resolution.
- Differences in emotional expression or regulation can easily be misread as coldness, overreaction, or rejection, activating defensive responses. Either neurotype can internalize or externalize, what do you tend to do?

Recognizing when one of the Big 6 is driving your behavior is key to stepping out of Stupid Enemy Mode before damage is done.



Reflection Question

How Do the Big 6 Show Up in Your Marriage?

Take a moment to reflect individually or as a couple. Think about recent conflicts or moments of tension.

Big Emotion	How Does This Show Up for Me?	How Does My Partner Show This Emotion?
Sadness	Do I withdraw? Cry? Become quiet?	Does my partner get quiet or seem distant?
Anger	Do I raise my voice? Get sarcastic?	Does my partner shut down or lash out?
Fear	Do I avoid conflict? Become controlling?	Does my partner become anxious or defensive?
Shame	Do I get defensive? Blame others?	Does my partner apologize excessively or hide?
Disgust	Do I criticize harshly? Feel contempt?	Does my partner express frustration or disdain?
Hopelessness	Do I think "Why bother?" or feel numb?	Does my partner seem to give up or disengage?



Reflection Question

What patterns do you notice about how you each express or suppress these emotions?
How might misreading these signals lead you both into Stupid Enemy Mode?

Recognizing Stupid Enemy Mode in Neurodiverse Relationships

Here are common signs that you or your partner might be in Stupid Enemy Mode:

- You replay arguments in your head, building a case against your spouse.
- You feel justified in being harsh, critical, or dismissive.
- You notice a desire to "punish" your partner emotionally (withdraw affection, silent treatment, sarcasm).
- You lose curiosity about your partner's perspective.
- Your goal shifts from connection to self-protection or control.

For neurodiverse couples, remember:

- Processing time differences can be misread as avoidance.

- Sensory overload can look like irritability or coldness.
- Literal thinking may cause unintended hurt.
- Emotional dysregulation might escalate simple frustrations into overwhelming reactions.

The brain's relational circuits shut off in these moments, making it nearly impossible to "feel" love or empathy until you intentionally reset.

Processing Big Emotions Before They Process You

To escape Stupid Enemy Mode, you must learn to recognize, name, and process your big emotions in real-time. Here's a simple framework adapted from Wilder & Warner's work:

The 3-Step Emotional Processing Tool

1. Pause & Notice

- Ask: "What am I feeling right now?" Do a Body Scan: "What am I feeling in my body?"
- Identify if one (or more) of the Big 6 is present.
- Example: "I notice I'm feeling a lot of anger and shame after that comment."

2. Name Without Blame

- State your emotion without accusing your partner.
- Example: "I'm feeling really overwhelmed with anger not because I think you're against me, but because I need to process what just happened."

3. Regulate & Relate

- Use calming strategies: deep breathing, brief time-outs, sensory tools (important for neurodivergent partners).
- Return to the conversation with curiosity: *“Can we try to understand what’s happening between us without making each other the enemy?”*

Practice Exercise: Creating a “Big Emotion” Check-In

As a couple, commit to using a daily or weekly check-in where you both answer:

1. What’s one Big Emotion I’ve felt strongly this week? (Sharing a big emotion doesn’t mean blaming your spouse for the big emotions.)
2. How did I handle it? Did I recognize it before slipping into enemy mode?
3. How can I invite my partner to help me process, rather than push them away?

Example:

“I felt a lot of fear about finances this week. I realized I snapped at you when you asked about a purchase. Next time, I want to pause and say, ‘I’m feeling anxious about money right now’ instead of getting defensive.”

Final Thought: Turning Enemy Mode into Ally Mode

Stupid Enemy Mode thrives in unawareness. But when you and your spouse learn to recognize the signals, name your emotions, and process together when regulated, you can turn moments of potential division into opportunities for deeper connection.

In neurodiverse marriages, grace is essential. Different brains handle emotions differently. The goal isn’t perfection but building a shared language around emotions and enemy mode, so you can face challenges *together*—as allies, not adversaries.



Reflection Questions

1. When was the last time you realized—*too late*—that you were in Stupid Enemy Mode?
2. Which of the Big 6 Emotions tends to trigger you the fastest?
3. How does neurodiversity in your marriage affect how each of you processes emotions?
4. What's one practical step you can take this week to pause and process before reacting?
5. How can you remind each other, gently, when enemy mode is showing up?



SOAP Method

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”

— *Ephesians 4:26-27 (ESV)*

Or

Proverbs 12:18 (NIV)

“The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

This passage reminds us that emotions like anger aren't sinful but how we *handle* them matters. Unprocessed emotions open the door to enemy mode, where the real "enemy" isn't your spouse—it's disconnection, bitterness, and broken trust.

S (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

O (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage?)

A (Application, How does this apply to you?)

Prayer (Write a prayer, personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)



Personal Reflection

Identify a Recent Challenge. How did you respond? What emotions did you experience? Were you able to get out of enemy mode?



Reflection Question

How can this Biblical wisdom guide us when enemy mode tempts us to escalate?



After Group Coaching Reflection

What is something I took away from group or my coaching session? Is there something someone said that resonated or something new for me to ponder or invite Jesus into to examine a blind spot or growth area?

Lesson/Session 4

Chapter 5: Intelligent Enemy Mode

Confronting Intelligent Enemy Mode: The Trap of Self-Justified Selfishness

Based on Chapter 5 of Enemy Mode by Dr. Jim Wilder, With Insights from The Pandora Problem also by Dr. Jim Wilder

Introduction: What is Intelligent Enemy Mode?

In Chapter 5 of *Enemy Mode*, Dr. Jim Wilder introduces us to the most dangerous and deceptive form of relational breakdown: Intelligent Enemy Mode. Unlike Simple or Stupid Enemy Mode, where reactions are impulsive or emotional, Intelligent Enemy Mode is *calculated*. It's when your brain deliberately positions your spouse as "the problem" and justifies strategies to protect yourself, gain control, or avoid vulnerability.

This isn't about yelling or shutting down it's about subtle, strategic disconnection. You might smile, remain calm, or appear rational on the surface, but underneath, you've decided that staying relational isn't worth it. You're now focused on winning, avoiding responsibility, or preserving your comfort, often at your spouse's expense.

For neurodiverse couples, Intelligent Enemy Mode can creep in unnoticed. It often disguises itself as "logical reasoning," "self-protection," or "being practical." Especially when differences in communication, emotional expression, or sensory processing already create challenges, it's easy to fall into a mindset of:

- *"If they would just think like me, this wouldn't be a problem."*
- *"I'll just do what works for me and avoid the drama."*
- *"I'm not being mean—I'm being efficient."*

This is where Wilder's insights from *The Pandora Problem* become critical. In that book, he explores the problem of selfishness how the human tendency to prioritize self over relationships leads to what he calls a "Pandora mindset": a way of living where we justify actions that serve ourselves, even when they harm those around us.

The Link Between Intelligent Enemy Mode and Selfishness

Wilder explains that Intelligent Enemy Mode thrives on self-justification. It's not overt cruelty—it's the quiet decision to stop caring well for others when it becomes inconvenient, uncomfortable, or threatens our pride.

In *The Pandora Problem*, he describes how selfishness often wears a mask:

- It rationalizes: "I'm only doing this because they left me no choice."
- It minimizes: "It's not a big deal—they'll get over it."
- It blames: "If they weren't so emotional/demanding/confusing, I wouldn't have to act this way."
- It avoids vulnerability: "Why should I open up when they won't understand me?"

For neurodiverse couples, where neurological differences can already make emotional connection challenging, this mindset can silently erode intimacy. Intelligent Enemy Mode allows one or both partners to opt out of relational growth while feeling entirely justified.



Personal Reflection

Signs You Might Be in Intelligent Enemy Mode

Ask yourself:

- Am I more focused on being *right* than being *connected*?
- Do I withhold information, affection, or cooperation as a form of control?
- Do I internally view my spouse as an "obstacle" rather than a partner?

- Have I developed narratives like, *"They'll never change, so why bother?"*
- Do I pride myself on staying "calm and logical" while dismissing my spouse's emotional needs?
- Am I using my neurodivergence or my spouse's neurodivergence as an excuse to avoid relational responsibility?

If you answered "yes" to any of these, Intelligent Enemy Mode might be active.



Discussion Prompt

How Does Self-Justification Show Up in Your Marriage?

Complete this table individually or as a couple:

Scenario	My Self-Justifying Thought	Relational Cost
When my partner expresses frustration	"They're overreacting—I'll ignore it."	Partner feels unheard or dismissed
When I don't want to explain my feelings	"It's too much effort—they should know me."	Emotional distance grows
When sensory overload hits	"I have to shut them out to survive."	No communication about my needs
When routines get disrupted	"If they cared, they wouldn't interrupt me."	Bitterness and silent resentment
When I feel misunderstood	"Why try? They'll never get it."	Hopelessness replaces teamwork

How often do your internal justifications prioritize your comfort over your connection? How can recognizing these patterns help you re-engage relationally?

Breaking Free: Choosing Love Over Selfishness

The core solution to Intelligent Enemy Mode is humility and relational courage. It's the willingness to admit, *"I've made my spouse the enemy in my mind"* and to choose connection even when it's inconvenient or uncomfortable.

Dr. Wilder emphasizes that escaping this mode requires us to:

1. Recognize When We're Justifying Selfishness
 - Notice when you're crafting mental narratives that excuse disconnection.
2. Rebuild Joy Bonds Intentionally
 - Instead of waiting until you "feel like it," choose small acts of kindness, curiosity, or service to reopen relational circuits.
3. Practice Confession and Repair
 - In *The Pandora Problem*, Wilder highlights the power of admitting when we've operated out of self-interest. For couples, this might sound like:

"I realize I've been distant because it was easier than engaging with you. I'm sorry."
4. Embrace Differences Without Using Them as Shields
 - Neurodiverse couples must learn to say, *"Yes, we're wired differently, but that's not an excuse to stop loving well."*

Practice Exercise: The "Enemy Narrative" Reset/ Discussion

1. Identify a Recent Situation where you mentally positioned your spouse as the problem.
2. Write out your internal self-justifying narrative (be honest!).

3. Now, rewrite that narrative from a relational perspective, focusing on curiosity and compassion. Write out your internal self-justifying narrative (be honest!).

Example:

- *Self-Justifying Thought:*
“They always nag me about schedules—they just want to control me.”
- *Relational Reframe:*
“They feel anxious when plans aren’t clear. How can I communicate better so they feel secure?”

From Enemies to Teammates

In neurodiverse marriages, Intelligent Enemy Mode often feels like the “safe” option avoiding conflict, staying in your comfort zone, or relying on logic to dismiss emotional complexity. But true safety in marriage comes from staying relational, even when it’s hard.

Dr. Wilder reminds us that selfishness isn’t just about big, obvious actions it’s about the daily decisions to care more about “me” than “we.” Recognizing this pattern is the first step to cultivating a marriage where differences are navigated with grace, humility, and a commitment to connection.

Renewing Our Minds and Hearts

As we confront Intelligent Enemy Mode and the subtle pull of self-justified selfishness, we must remember that lasting change doesn’t come through willpower alone. True transformation in a Christian marriage—especially within the complexities of a neurodiverse relationship requires inviting God into the places where we’ve quietly made our spouse “the enemy.”

Scripture reminds us that the battle isn’t merely behavioral—it’s a renewal of the mind and a reorientation of the heart toward love, humility, and grace.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”
— *Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)*

This isn’t a call to neglect your God-given design, especially important in neurodiverse marriages where honoring individual needs is vital but it *is* a call to resist the instinct to prioritize self at the expense of the relationship.

When Intelligent Enemy Mode takes over, it whispers:

- “Protect yourself.”
- “They don’t deserve your effort.”
- “It’s easier to disconnect.”

But the Spirit of God invites us to something higher:

- Choose connection over convenience.
- Offer grace where pride wants to rule.
- See your spouse not as a burden, but as a beloved partner in Christ.

A Prayer for Escaping Intelligent Enemy Mode

Father God,

We confess that too often we slip into patterns of self-protection, pride, and quiet disconnection.

Teach us to recognize when our minds justify selfishness and when our hearts grow cold toward each other.

Renew our thoughts so we no longer see each other through the lens of frustration or control, but through Your eyes of compassion and grace.

Help us embrace our differences—not as reasons to withdraw, but as opportunities to reflect Your creativity and love in our marriage.

Fill us with the humility of Christ, who did not cling to His own comfort but gave Himself for relationship.

Strengthen us to choose connection, even when it's hard.

May Your Spirit guide us out of enemy mode and into a place of peace, unity, and joy.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



Reflection Questions for Spiritual Growth

1. Where do I sense God gently convicting me about self-justified disconnection in my marriage?

2. How can I invite the Holy Spirit to alert me when I'm slipping into Intelligent Enemy Mode?
3. What does it look like, practically, to "value my spouse above myself" while still honoring my neurodiverse needs or limitations?
4. How can prayer and Scripture become part of our couple's strategy to stay relational, even during conflict?
5. Is there an area where I need to seek forgiveness from God and from my spouse for allowing selfishness to guide my actions?

Remember, escaping Intelligent Enemy Mode isn't about achieving perfection it's about daily surrender. In a neurodiverse marriage, grace must abound—not only toward your partner but also toward yourself. God doesn't expect you to navigate these challenges alone. He offers wisdom, strength, and a model of self-giving love through Christ.

When both partners commit to walking in humility, guided by the Spirit, even the most ingrained patterns of disconnection can be redeemed. What the enemy, whether internal or external, intended for division, God can transform into deeper unity and testimony of His grace.

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

— 1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)

Let love, not self-justification, be the lens through which you see your spouse each day.



Reflection Question

How can I love well? How do I get out of self-justification? What do I primarily use as my self-justification? Can I hear when I am in intelligent enemy mode?

Write out your internal self-justifying narrative (be honest!).



SOAP Method

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

— *Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)*

Or

Proverbs 21:2 (NIV)

“A person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart.”

S (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

O (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

A (Application, How does this apply to you?)

Prayer (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)



Personal Reflection

How can this Biblical wisdom guide us when enemy mode tempts us to escalate?



After Group Coaching Reflection

What is something I took away from group or my coaching session? Is there something someone said that resonated or something new for me to ponder or invite Jesus into to examine a blind spot or growth area? Write out your internal self-justifying narrative (be honest!).

Session 5

Chapter 6 Enemy Mode is All Around Us

Guarding Your Neurodiverse Marriage in a World of Division

Based on Chapter 6 of *Enemy Mode* by Dr. Jim Wilder

With Insights from *The 4 Habits of Joy-Filled People* by Marcus Warner & Chris Coursey*

Introduction: Living in a Culture of Enemy Mode

In Chapter 6 of *Enemy Mode*, Dr. Jim Wilder makes a sobering observation: Enemy Mode isn't just something we slip into occasionally it's the atmosphere we breathe. Modern culture thrives on division, competition, and outrage. From workplace dynamics to political discourse, from social media feeds to family debates, we are constantly surrounded by cues that trigger our brains to see others as threats or opponents.

For neurodiverse couples, this cultural reality adds another layer of challenge. When the world around you normalizes disconnection, defensiveness, and "us vs. them" thinking, it becomes even easier for those patterns to seep into your marriage, especially when you already face daily hurdles due to differences in communication styles, emotional processing, sensory needs, or worldview.

Wilder warns that constant exposure to enemy-mode environments conditions our brains to stay in a defensive posture. If you're always in fight-or-flight mode at work, online, or in extended family settings, it becomes second nature to carry that same mindset home, to your spouse.

How Enemy Mode Creeps into Neurodiverse Marriages

Enemy mode doesn't need a major conflict to take root. It thrives in small, everyday moments where disconnection feels easier than staying relational:

- **At Work:**
A neurodivergent partner navigating a high-stress job with rigid social expectations may come home emotionally drained, with their relational circuits already "off." The neurotypical spouse might interpret this as disinterest or coldness, triggering their own defensive response.

- **At Home:**
Differing views on routines, parenting, or household management can escalate quickly when both partners have been conditioned by external stress to expect opposition rather than collaboration.
- **Differences in Opinions or Politics:**
Neurodiverse couples often experience contrasting ways of processing information or forming opinions. One partner may be highly analytical and literal, while the other is emotionally intuitive or context-driven. In today's polarized culture, differing views can easily turn into silent judgments, avoidance, or dismissive attitudes.



Discussion Prompt

Where Does the World's Enemy Mode Enter Your Marriage?

Take a moment to reflect on external influences:

Environment	How Does It Trigger Enemy Mode in Me?	How Does It Spill Into My Marriage?
Workplace Stress	Constant pressure, feeling misunderstood	I come home withdrawn or irritable
Social Media	Seeing negativity, arguments, or comparison	I become critical, impatient, or distracted
Family Dynamics	Navigating differing expectations or judgments	I project frustrations onto my spouse
News & Politics	Exposure to fear-based or divisive narratives	I assume my spouse "doesn't get it" or shut down
Church/Community	Feeling isolated due to neurodiversity	I disengage emotionally, feeling "on my own"



Reflection Question

Where do you notice outside stressors priming you to see your spouse as part of "the problem"? How can you become more aware of when external enemy mode influences your internal world? Write out your internal self-justifying narrative (be honest!).

The Antidote: Cultivating Joy in a World of Division

In *The 4 Habits of Joy-Filled People*, Marcus Warner and Chris Coursey explain that joy is not merely happiness it's the deep, relational sense that *"I'm glad to be with you, no matter what."* Joy keeps our relational circuits on, even when life is stressful or opinions differ.

Enemy Mode thrives when fear, frustration, or fatigue dominate our interactions. But joy, especially practiced intentionally, can rewire our brains to stay relational, even when surrounded by negativity.

Warner & Coursey outline key habits that help resist the pull of enemy mode:

The Joy Habits:

1. Notice and Amplify Joy Moments
 - Focus on shared moments where you genuinely enjoy each other's presence.

2. Quiet to Recharge

- Learn to calm yourself and create space for relational reset—especially important for neurodivergent partners prone to sensory overload.

3. Practice Appreciation Daily

- Shift your attention toward what you value about your spouse, rather than what frustrates you.

4. Anchor in Secure Attachments

- Build rhythms that remind each other, *“We’re on the same team, even when life is hard.”*

Exercise: Building a Joy Buffer Against Enemy Mode

Reflect 1 on 1 or Complete this as a couple:

1. List 1 or 2 Small Moments This Week When You Felt Joy Together:
(*Examples: Shared a laugh, enjoyed a quiet coffee, worked through a challenge calmly.*)
2. Write out your internal self-justifying narrative (be honest!).

3. How Can You Create More of These Moments Intentionally?
(*Plan simple activities that foster connection without pressure.*)

4. What Is One Way You Can "Quiet to Recharge" Before Engaging Each Other After a Stressful Day?

(Example: A 5- 15 minute pause before discussing tasks or conflicts.)

5. Write a Statement of Appreciation for Your Spouse:

(Something specific you're grateful for in how they navigate life, especially considering neurodiverse challenges.)

In a world saturated with division and enemy mode, God calls us to be peacemakers starting in our homes. For neurodiverse couples, living at peace doesn't mean avoiding conflict or pretending differences don't exist. It means choosing relational connection over cultural patterns of disconnection. Peacemaking is different than peacekeeping.

Making peace means a willingness to have civil disagreement and talk about hurts and issues not avoiding them.

This peace isn't passive, it's an active, daily choice to resist the enemy mode that surrounds us and to nurture joy, understanding, and grace within your marriage.

Your Marriage as a Refuge from Enemy Mode

Dr. Wilder reminds us that while we can't control the world's atmosphere of division, we can cultivate a different atmosphere in our homes. Imagine your marriage as a sanctuary a place where, despite neurological differences and external pressures, you both feel safe, seen, and celebrated.

By practicing joy habits and recognizing when external stress pushes you toward enemy mode, you can transform your relationship into a refuge. In doing so, your marriage becomes not only stronger but also a testimony of God's peace in a fractured world.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

— *Matthew 5:9 (NIV)*

Weekly Joy Journal: Resisting Enemy Mode Through Intentional Joy

Use this tool to strengthen your marriage by tracking joy, recognizing enemy mode triggers, and fostering connection despite external pressures. Even if your joy is not brought by your spouse right now, look for joy and connection with anyone in little things!

How to Use the Joy Journal:

At the end of each day (or a few times a week), take 5-10 minutes individually or as a couple to reflect and complete this simple worksheet. The goal is to rewire your brain toward connection by noticing joy and becoming aware of patterns that lead to enemy mode.



"We don't drift into joy—we cultivate it. And joy is what keeps enemy mode at bay."

— Inspired by Warner, Coursey & Wilder

Joy Journal Template — Week of _____

Day	Joy Moment We Shared Today	Where Did I Feel Enemy Mode Today?	How Did I Return to Relational Connection?
Monday	<i>(Example: We laughed while cooking dinner.)</i>	<i>(Example: Felt defensive after a comment.)</i>	<i>(Example: Took a breath, asked a curious question.)</i>
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			



Reflection Questions

1. What patterns did I notice about when and where enemy mode was triggered?
(Work stress, sensory overload, misunderstandings, external negativity, etc.)
2. Which joy moments surprised me the most this week?
(Did small, unexpected things bring connection?)
3. How did practicing appreciation or quieting myself help me stay relational?
4. What's one intentional joy habit I want to carry into next week?
(Example: Start each day with a 30-second gratitude share.)
5. Where do I need to invite God's peace to guard my heart and mind against the world's enemy mode?
(Consider Philippians 4:7 — "And the peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.")



SOAP Method

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”
— *Romans 12:18 (NIV)*

S (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

O (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

A (Application, How does this apply to you?)

Prayer (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)



Personal Reflection

Have you wrongly used that verse to avoid conflict and resolutions?



After Group Coaching Reflection

What is something I took away from group or my coaching session? Is there something someone said that resonated or something new for me to ponder or invite Jesus into to examine a blind spot or growth area?

Lesson 6

Chapters 7 & 8 of Enemy Mode

Recognizing and Admitting Enemy Mode in Myself

The Courage to See—and Confess—Enemy Mode

In *Enemy Mode*, Dr. Jim Wilder explains that one of the greatest relational skills we can develop is learning to recognize when we've slipped into enemy mode especially in ourselves. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on two vital steps for relational healing:

1. Recognizing Enemy Mode in Myself
2. Admitting My Enemy Mode to Others

While it's easy to spot defensive, dismissive, or hurtful behavior in our spouse, it takes humility, self-awareness, and spiritual maturity to notice when we have disengaged, become defensive, or subtly turned our partner into "the enemy."

For neurodiverse couples, this work can feel even more complex. Differences in emotional processing, communication styles, or sensory thresholds may make it harder to spot the shift into enemy mode, especially when a partner believes they're simply "managing stress," "being logical," or "needing space." However, without recognizing these patterns, disconnection quietly grows.

Dr. Wilder reminds us: We can't fix what we won't admit.

And healing starts when we stop blaming, start noticing, and humbly confess, "*I've been in enemy mode.*"

Recognizing Enemy Mode in Myself: A Practical Checklist

Adapted from Dr. Wilder's Enemy Mode Self-Check (Chapter 7)

Use this tool regularly to spot when you've flipped into enemy mode, even in subtle ways.

● Enemy Mode Self-Checklist:

Check any that apply to your recent thoughts, feelings, or behaviors toward your spouse.

- ☐ I feel justified in withdrawing, criticizing, or ignoring my spouse.

- ☐ I've stopped being curious about their perspective or emotions.
- ☐ I view interactions as something to end quickly, not opportunities for connection.
- ☐ I mentally rehearse why I'm right and they're wrong.
- ☐ I feel little to no desire to repair after tension or conflict.
- ☐ I'm using logic to dismiss emotional needs.
- ☐ I avoid eye contact, touch, or warm communication.

I tell myself, *"If they would just change, things would be fine."*

- ☐ I feel relief when we're distant because it feels easier.
- ☐ I minimize or excuse my behavior: *"I'm just tired,"* or *"That's just how I am."*
- ☐ I believe disconnection is safer than vulnerability.



Personal Reflection

If you checked 3 or more, you're likely operating in enemy mode even if you don't feel overtly angry or upset. All of us can go into enemy mode. Are you open to admitting it or recognizing it why or why not? Or are you focused on when your spouse is in enemy mode?

Admitting My Enemy Mode: The Power of Humility and Confession

Chapter 8 emphasizes a hard truth: Recognizing enemy mode isn't enough; freedom comes when we *admit it*. Confession isn't about shame; it's about relational repair. In neurodiverse marriages, where misunderstandings and emotional mismatches are common, being able to say, *"I see that I disconnected, and I want to reconnect,"* is transformational.

Confession realigns us with God's heart and reopens relational circuits with our spouse. It requires setting aside pride, self-justification, and fear of appearing weak. In your anger and dysregulation if you sin, you need to confess and repair. Hoping it will go away only compounds the problem relationally.

Practice Exercise: The Enemy Mode Confession Framework

When you notice you've been in enemy mode, use this simple script to practice humble admission and open the door for reconnection:

1. Name It:

"I realize I've been in enemy mode toward you."

2. Describe Without Defending:

"I noticed I was shutting down / avoiding / being critical because I felt _____."

3. Express Desire for Connection:

"I don't want to stay disconnected. I value our relationship, and I'm sorry for letting pride/self-protection take over."

4. Invite Partnership:

"How can we reset and move forward together?"

Example:

"I realize I've been in enemy mode this week. I've been distant and dismissive, especially when you asked about our plans. I think I felt overwhelmed and slipped into just wanting to

avoid everything. I'm sorry—I don't want to keep shutting you out. Can we take some time to reconnect and talk through things?"



Reflection Questions

1. Why is it hard for me to admit when I've been in enemy mode?
(Fear of blame? Pride? Not recognizing it until too late?)
2. How does neurodiversity in our marriage influence how we both experience or express enemy mode?
3. What's one situation this week where I should have confessed disconnection but didn't?
4. How does God's view of confession differ from how I often view it (as weakness or failure)?
5. How can I make humble admission a regular part of our relational rhythm—not just after big conflicts, but in small moments too?

Confession Heals, Pride Divides

Enemy mode thrives in silence, pride, and self-justification. But when we walk in humility, God provides a path back to peace, not just with Him, but with each other.

Remember: In neurodiverse marriages, perfection isn't the goal. Awareness, confession, and reconnection are what build lasting intimacy. Each time you humbly admit, *"I've been in enemy mode,"* you weaken the power of disconnection and strengthen the bond God designed for your marriage.

"God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

— *James 4:6 (NIV)*

Stay humble. Stay relational. Let confession be the bridge that brings healing—not just to your soul, but to your relationship.



SOAP Method

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson. Which one speaks to you about yourself not your spouse?

1. Proverbs 11:2 (NIV)

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”

Pride keeps us stuck in enemy mode—humility invites wisdom and restoration.

2. James 5:16 (NIV)

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

Confession isn't just a spiritual act—it's a path to relational and emotional healing.

3. 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

4. Proverbs 16:18 (NIV)

“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Unchecked pride leads to relational breakdown—but confession prevents that fall.

S (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

O (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

A (Application, How does this apply to you?)

Prayer (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)



Personal Reflection

Is admitting you were wrong or caused harm or confession difficult for you why or why not? Do you weaponize your spouse’s confessions or hold their weakness gently?



After Group Coaching Reflection

What is something I took away from group or my coaching session? Is there something someone said that resonated or something new for me to ponder or invite Jesus into to examine a blind spot or growth area?

Session 7

Preparing to Escape & Escaping Enemy Mode

Chapters 9 & 10

You Can't Escape Enemy Mode by Accident

In Chapters 9 and 10 of *Enemy Mode*, Dr. Jim Wilder emphasizes a critical truth: escaping enemy mode requires preparation and intentional action. Once our brains flip into enemy mode, whether simple, stupid, or intelligent, it's nearly impossible to "feel" like reconnecting. The relational circuits are off, and self-protection takes over.

The good news? You *can* train your brain and your relationship to recognize the signs early and have practical strategies ready to escape enemy mode before lasting damage is done.

Wilder offers us two vital steps:

1. Prepare — Build habits and awareness before enemy mode hits.
2. Act — Use proven techniques to reset your brain and re-engage relationally.

Part 1: Preparing to Escape Enemy Mode

Dr. Wilder provides a Preparation List to help us avoid being caught off-guard by enemy mode. Think of this as building your "emergency exit plan" before the fire starts.

Here's an adapted version for neurodiverse couples:

Preparation Checklist:

Review this list together and personalize it for your marriage.

1. Learn to Recognize Your Early Warning Signs
 - What physical, emotional, or behavioral cues signal you're slipping into enemy mode?
(Examples: Tense muscles, avoiding eye contact, irritability, obsessive thinking, shutdowns.)

2. Establish a Shared Language for Enemy Mode

- Agree on a non-blaming phrase like:
"I think enemy mode might be showing up for us right now."

3. Build Joy Strength Daily

- Practice habits like appreciation, shared smiles, or quieting to keep relational circuits strong.

4. Create Safe "Pause" Strategies

- Especially for neurodivergent partners, identify calming routines to prevent overwhelm.
(Examples: Use a fidget, take a sensory break, or step outside.)

5. Identify Trusted People for Support

- Who can you call or message when you're stuck in enemy mode and need perspective?

6. Pray Together Regularly (Only if Prayer is not Weaponized)

- Invite God into your daily rhythms, asking Him to guard your hearts against disconnection.

7. Keep Short Accounts

- Don't let small irritations pile up. Address issues while they're still manageable. Perhaps a weekly check in?

Exercise: Create Your Couple's Escape Plan

Fill this out together:

Preparation Step

Our Personalized Strategy

Early Warning Signs

Our Enemy Mode Phrase

“

”

Daily Joy Habit

Calming/Quieting Routine

Who We Can Reach Out To

Prayer Commitment

How We'll Keep Short
Accounts



Discussion Prompt

How can we remind each other *gently* to use this plan when tensions rise?

Part 2: Escaping Enemy Mode

(Inspired by Chapter 10)

Once enemy mode hits, preparation alone isn't enough you need practical tools to reset your brain and return to relational connection.

Dr. Wilder outlines key strategies for escaping enemy mode. Here's an adaptation for neurodiverse couples, considering emotional, sensory, and cognitive differences.

Escape Techniques:

Use these in the moment when you recognize disconnection.

1. Quiet Yourself First

- Before engaging your spouse, regulate your nervous system.
(*Deep breathing, grounding exercises, weighted blanket, or movement.*)

2. Name the State Out Loud

- Saying, "*I think I'm in enemy mode,*" breaks its silent power.

3. Shift to Appreciation

- Think of a recent moment where you felt connected, safe, or grateful.

4. Reconnect with a Safe Action

- This could be gentle eye contact, a soft tone, or asking a curious question.
(*Example: "Can we pause and reset together?"*)

5. Invite, Don't Demand

- Offer reconnection without pressure. Recognize that both partners may need different pacing to return to relational mode.

6. Pray or Use a Grounding Scripture

- A short prayer or verse can re-center your focus on humility and grace.
(*Example: "Lord, help me to love over being right."*)

7. If Needed, Take a Structured Break

- But *always* agree on when and how you'll return to the conversation.

Exercise: Your Personal Escape Kit

Each partner fills this out:

Escape Step	My Best Strategy
How I Quiet Myself	_____
How I'll Name Enemy Mode In Myself (Not My Spouse)	_____
My "Go-To" Appreciation Thought	_____
A Safe Way I Can Reconnect	_____
A Prayer or Verse I'll Use	_____
How I'll Signal a Healthy Break	_____



Reflection Questions

1. What escape techniques work best for me when I'm overwhelmed or defensive?
2. How can I better support my spouse's escape process, even if it looks different from mine?

3. How does our faith give us strength and hope when enemy mode feels persistent?
4. What small success can we celebrate this week where we escaped enemy mode faster than before?



SOAP Method

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

— 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

S (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

O (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

A (Application, How does this apply to you?)

Prayer (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)



Personal Reflection

Do you use your neurotype, pain or past trauma to excuse how you respond to others?



After Group Coaching Reflection

is something I took away from group or my coaching session? Is there something someone said that resonated or something new for me to ponder or invite Jesus into to examine a blind spot or growth area?

Enemy mode may feel automatic, but God promises that there is always a way out. It requires awareness, humility, and the willingness to take that "escape route" when offered. For neurodiverse couples, this means extending grace to yourselves and each other when old patterns pull you toward disconnection, and celebrating every small victory when you choose relational re-engagement.

Session 8

Helping Others Escape & Helping My Identity Group Escape Enemy Mode

Chapters 11 and 12

Helping Others—and Your Marriage—Escape Enemy Mode

Enemy Mode Isn't Just *Your* Problem

In Chapters 11 and 12 of *Enemy Mode*, Dr. Jim Wilder shifts the focus outward it's no longer just about recognizing and escaping your own enemy mode. It's about learning how to help others, including your spouse, family, and even your broader identity group, escape disconnection and re-enter relational mode.

For neurodiverse couples, this is crucial. Both partners often face misunderstanding—not just within their marriage, but from workplaces, churches, extended family, or social circles that don't fully grasp the dynamics of neurodiversity. This can leave both partners frequently surrounded by people operating in enemy mode, whether through ignorance, impatience, or misinterpretation.

The challenge becomes twofold:

1. How do you lovingly help your spouse escape enemy mode without triggering deeper defenses?
2. How do you influence your family, community, or church your *identity group*, to foster relational environments instead of hostile, disconnected ones?

The answer lies in practicing gentle leadership, relational safety, and embodying the habits that draw others back to connection.

Helping Your Spouse Escape Enemy Mode

Wilder emphasizes that you can't force someone out of enemy mode, but you *can* create the conditions where it's easier for them to return to relational mode. This may take some marriage coaching with a neurodiverse trained coach or counselor.

Here's how this applies in a neurodiverse marriage:

Keys to Helping Your Spouse Escape Enemy Mode

(Adapted from Chapter 11)

1. Stay Relational Yourself

- Your calm, connected presence invites them to re-engage. If you flip into enemy mode too, no progress will happen.

2. Offer Non-Threatening Connection

- Use soft tones, non-intrusive body language, or simple gestures like offering a cup of tea or sitting nearby without pressure.

3. Avoid Logic Battles

- Especially in neurodiverse dynamics, trying to "reason" someone out of enemy mode often backfires. Focus on emotional safety, not intellectual debate.

4. Name the State with Grace

- Say something like: *"I can tell things feel tense—I'm here when you're ready to reconnect."*

5. Use Shared Joy Memories

- Gently reference a positive moment to spark warmth.
(Example: *"This reminds me of when we handled that situation together last month—we make a good team."*)

6. Be Patient with Processing Differences

- A neurodivergent partner may need more time to shift states due to neurological wiring. Don't rush the process.



Discussion Prompts

My Role in Helping My Spouse Escape Enemy Mode

Reflect and discuss:

1. What typically helps my spouse feel safe enough to reconnect?
(Think sensory preferences, tone, space, words, or actions.)
2. What habits of mine accidentally keep them in enemy mode longer?
(Examples: Pushing for answers, raising my voice, withdrawing.)
3. What is one thing I can practice this week to create a safer path back to connection for my spouse?

Helping Our Identity Group Escape Enemy Mode

(Inspired by Chapter 12)

Wilder introduces the concept of identity groups the people we naturally align with, such as family, church, workplace teams, or cultural communities. These groups shape how we think, behave, and interact.

For neurodiverse couples, your identity group may include:

- Your marriage

- Your immediate family
- Your faith community
- Neurodivergent or neurodiversity-affirming groups
- Your workplace or social circles

Often, these groups unknowingly function in chronic enemy mode—favoring criticism over curiosity, disconnection over empathy, or rigid thinking over grace. You may be tempted to join enemy mode or circle the wagons or only seek insight from those who will reinforce your thoughts or behaviors versus someone who will call you to your better self.



Reflection Question

Is your home high joy or low joy? High conflict or low conflict? What is the legacy you want your children to see from your marriage and family life? You are building an “identity group” in your family? Are you brave enough to ask your kids about their experience of you and home life? What do you think your kids would say?

How to Influence Your Identity Group Toward Relational Living

(Adapted from Wilder's principles)

1. Model Relational Behavior

- Be the example of staying calm, connected, and compassionate—even when others are reactive.

2. Create Joyful Micro-Moments

- Smile, express appreciation, and celebrate small wins. Joy disrupts enemy mode culture.

3. Tell Stories of Relational Success

- Share testimonies of times when choosing connection over conflict led to better outcomes—especially within your neurodiverse marriage.

4. Gently Call Out Disconnection

- Use phrases like: *“I wonder if we’re slipping into ‘us vs. them’ thinking here.”*

5. Champion Identity Statements

- Remind your group:
“In this family/church/team, we choose to stay relational, even when we disagree.”

6. Protect Neurodiverse Voices

- Advocate for understanding, pacing, and sensory considerations, helping others avoid unintentionally pushing neurodivergent individuals into enemy mode.

Exercise: Shaping Our Identity Group

1. Who are the key identity groups influencing our marriage?
(List 2-3: e.g., Church small group, extended family, workplace, etc.)
2. Where do we see chronic enemy mode patterns in these groups?
3. What is one small relational action we can take to shift the atmosphere?
(Example: Start meetings with appreciation, gently redirect divisive conversations.)
4. How can we, as a couple, embody a relational identity in these spaces?

As followers of Christ, we are called to be agents of reconnection—both in our marriages and in the wider communities we influence. In a world (and sometimes families or churches) stuck in enemy mode, your commitment to relational living becomes a testimony of God's grace, patience, and joy.



Reflection Question

Are you the same person at home as you are when you are in public?



SOAP Method

S is for writing out the Scripture. O is to make an observation from the text itself. A is how do I feel the Lord would ask me to apply this in my life. P is for prayer. Write a prayer personalizing this verse and your commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this area. You will be invited to do this each lesson.

Verses on Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Ephesians 4:31-32 (ESV)

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV)

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

S (Write the Scripture Out by Hand)

O (Observation, just observing the text itself what do you observe or notice in this passage you have chosen?)

A (Application, How does this apply to you?)

Prayer (Write a prayer personalizing this Scripture for you and ask the Holy Spirit to help move you to action.)



Personal Reflection

Do you view forgiveness and reconciliation as the same thing? We are commanded to forgive but reconciliation is a separate act based on trust, safety and repair. Do you demand forgiveness but do not repair? Do you confuse forgiveness and reconciliation? Do you nurse wounds and hold grudges?



After Group Coaching Reflection

What is something I took away from group or my coaching session? Is there something someone said that resonated or something new for me to ponder or invite Jesus into to examine a blind spot or growth area?

Final Thoughts

Answers From Dr. Wilder to some of our questions about attachment and pain and motivation.

So, real time skills needed for attachment to be joyful are not going to work at verbal communication (slow) speeds. Most people are looking for verbal solutions that are fairly ineffective and certainly not "safe." After reading these comments, perhaps you could clarify what the women are doing to build attachments that creates positivity instead of joy. The two are considerably different.

On Dan's question. The brain is prepared to be motivated (in long term ways) by joy, rest, fear or winning. The greater fears are loss of status, loss of identity, loss of control and avoidance of pain. Winning (is the usual alternative to attachment joy) generally means making the other person lose. So it is more accurate to say the brain is motivated to make others lose than it is to say we are motivated to win.

Short term motivations are breathe, drink, eat, sex, sleep, move and stop discomfort.

You are correct that without "tasting" some success with a given motivation that motivation will not prove motivating. It is very easy to train dopamine systems to change their responses to various "pleasures" and "motivators" so that motivator gains or loses strength. I will say that most men (people probably) can estimate who will give in first. They are usually very accurate. So men can and will predict who will tolerate the pain longer and if they think it is them they will bet the farm that their mate will cave in first if they refuse to change. They are actually making accurate predictions about attachment pain and hopeless feelings and who can last longer for the "win."

Hope that Helps! Jim Wilder



End of Course Reflection Question

Are you trying to outlast your partner and not have to do your work? Who can endure pain the most? What motivates you to change?

[illegible]

BONUS MATERIAL

Understanding Enemy Mode in Military and Combat Veterans or Law Enforcement

Inspired by retired US Army Brigadier General, Ray Woolridge's Insights in Enemy Mode by Dr. Jim Wilder

When Combat Training Meets Relationship Challenges

In *Enemy Mode*, retired Brigadier General Ray Woolridge offers a powerful insight:

Those trained for combat may be more susceptible to enemy mode—or worse, they may not even recognize it when it happens.”

For those with a military background especially soldiers trained for combat, or even those trained in law enforcement, enemy mode isn't just a reaction. It can become a way of life. Years of conditioning to identify threats, stay alert, suppress emotions, and operate in high-stress environments can rewire the brain to see disconnection, defensiveness, and control as *normal*.

This creates unique challenges in marriage, particularly for neurodiverse couples where:

- One partner is a veteran or has a military or law enforcement mindset shaped by service.
- One or both partners process emotions, sensory input, or communication differently due to neurodivergence.

In these relationships, enemy mode may feel like the default especially when stress, misunderstandings, or emotional conversations arise. The partner with military experience might not even *notice* they've shifted into enemy mode because that mindset once kept them safe, effective, or respected.

But what works in combat: hyper-awareness, emotional suppression, tactical thinking can be harmful in marriage, where vulnerability, connection, and emotional presence are key.

How Military Conditioning Can Mask Enemy Mode

Common Patterns in Military-Trained Individuals:

(Adapted from Woolridge's insights and Wilder's framework)

1. Emotional Detachment Feels Normal

- Years of training to "push through" emotions can make relational engagement feel foreign or unsafe.

2. Seeing Conversations as Tactical Maneuvers

- Discussions with a spouse may unconsciously become about *strategy* or *control* rather than connection.

3. Heightened Threat Perception

- Misunderstandings or disagreements at home can trigger defensive responses disproportionate to the situation.

4. Pride in Stoicism

- Viewing emotional expression—or admitting disconnection—as weakness.

5. Not Recognizing Simple or Intelligent Enemy Mode

- Because there's no visible conflict or outburst, a veteran may assume they're "fine," even while relationally shut down.



Personal Reflection

Is Military Mindset Fueling My Enemy Mode?

If you or your spouse has a military background, take time to reflect honestly:

Self-Check Questions	Yes / No
Do I often feel more comfortable in problem-solving mode than emotional connection?	_____
When conflict arises, do I default to shutting down, commanding, or withdrawing?	_____
Do I struggle to identify when I'm emotionally disengaged?	_____
Have I viewed relational vulnerability as a liability rather than a strength?	_____
Do I expect my spouse to "toughen up" or "move on" quickly after emotional moments?	_____
Do I pride myself on being unaffected by emotional situations?	_____
Have I ever thought, <i>"This isn't a big deal—why are they so emotional?"</i>	_____
Do I tend to "stand guard" in relationships rather than relax into trust and joy?	_____

If you answered "Yes" to several of these, military conditioning may be masking your awareness of enemy mode in your marriage.

Bridging the Gap: Moving from Combat Mode to Relational Mode

For veterans or those shaped by military culture, learning to turn off enemy mode isn't about abandoning strength—it's about redeeming strength through connection.

Steps to Rewire from Combat Thinking to Relational Presence:

1. Acknowledge the Value—and Limits—of Military Training
 - Honor the skills that served you in combat, but recognize they aren't suited for marriage dynamics.
2. Learn to Name Emotions Without Fear
 - Practice identifying what you feel before defaulting to tactical thinking.
(Example: "I notice I'm feeling defensive—not because you're my enemy, but because my brain thinks I'm under threat.")
3. Redefine Strength as Staying Relational
 - True courage in marriage is keeping your heart open when every instinct says to shut down or take control.
4. Invite Your Spouse to Be a Safe Ally, Not a Subordinate
 - Marriage is a partnership, not a chain of command.
5. Use Military Discipline to Build Relational Habits
 - Apply your commitment to routines by creating daily practices of appreciation, joy, and emotional check-ins.

Exercise: Redeeming My Military Mindset

1. What military habits or thought patterns show up in my marriage, especially during stress?
(*Example: Commanding tone, emotional suppression, tactical withdrawal.*)
2. How can I reframe these patterns to serve connection instead of control?
(*Example: Use discipline to pause and listen rather than react.*)
3. What does "relational strength" look like for me as a veteran (or spouse of one)?
4. How can my spouse support me as I learn to recognize enemy mode more quickly?



Scripture Reflection

Strength Redefined by Christ

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

— 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

In God's kingdom, strength isn't about stoicism or control it's about grace, humility, and relational presence. For those shaped by military life, this is a radical but freeing truth: You don't have to stay in combat mode. God invites you to lay down defensive postures and pick up the armor of love, patience, and connection.