

House md, Season 3, episode 20

House Training

This episode concerns issues of how we make decisions in our lives, and how we receive forgiveness for the bad ones.

Synopsis

A young scam artist is working a 'find the lady' routine in the street when she realises she can't think properly or make decisions: 'I can't decide'. She collapses and is admitted to Dr House's care. Hearing about her, House says 'Loss of free will. I like it. Maybe we can get Thomas Aquinas in for a consult.'

Dr Foreman talks to her and finds out how she has a job for just long enough to claim benefits and then leaves. He judges her for playing the system which she picks up on. She argues that they are alike except that she made some bad decisions, but Foreman denies this. Foreman is unimpressed that she took some hits off a crack pipe to feel 'happy'.

While the team try to find out what's wrong with her, various personal issues come into play. Dr Foreman is approached by his father to visit his mother who has Alzheimers as it's her 60th birthday. Although he hasn't been home in 8 years, Dr Foreman goes to his parents' hotel room and is pleased to find that his mother seems happy and lucid. She also asks him if he's happy and has friends and if he still prays. Meanwhile Dr Chase says he will tell Dr Cameron once a week, on Tuesdays, that he likes her and wants a relationship with her; even though she says she doesn't want to be with him. Dr House investigates Dr Wilson's romantic behaviour by asking his ex-wife Bonnie what he was like. Bonnie is trying to get Dr Wilson to take their dog Hector. Dr Wilson takes Dr Cuddy to an art exhibition but it's not Hockney, as he expected but paintings of sado-machochism, which make him embarrassed.

Dr Foreman eventually decides that the patient has cancer and that she is getting sick so quickly that they have to do something drastic. He makes a radical decision to give her whole body radiation, which Dr House enthuses about because it is so 'rad'. Nonetheless, Dr House explains the problems and side-effects of the treatment while encouraging the patient to sign consent. It is her decision and she signs, but it turns out to be a very bad decision, - the worst. She does not have cancer but an infection and infection which will now kill her as the radiation has made it impossible for her to fight it.

Dr Foreman now has to cope with the realisation that he has killed his patient. He asks Wilson for help to know how to tell her she is dying. Wilson talks about honesty, truth and making a human connection with the dying patient. Dr Foreman tells her and tries to connect with her in the way Dr Wilson suggested but she gets angry and sends him away. Foreman takes out his misery and frustration and guilt by punching a wall.

Devastated, Dr Foreman has the patient moved and goes to stay with her. He tells her that she was both wrong and right about him. He made bad decisions in his life when he stole cars and robbed people, but he made better decisions when he turned his life around and got educated and made something out of his life. He says that they are alike and asks for her forgiveness even though he doesn't expect it. She says she thought she always had time to change her life. She says it's good she had no children, and that she has no real family or friends. She says the world won't be any different because she was in it. Foreman admits that the last time he felt at home was when his mother hugged him as he was leaving the family home.

Foreman stays with her until she dies. He holds her hand and she strokes his fingers. Then House does some tests on her dead body to discover that she was infected with a common organism that got in through a scratch on her back made by a bra hook.

Dr Chase says that he doesn't know what he believes any more, but it's still helpful to talk to God, 'Listen. I don't know— I don't know what I believe, but sometimes I need to think there's something out there paying attention. So, when I can't talk to anybody, I talk to God and pretend somebody is listening.'

Dr House has a different view: 'Go home have a few drinks, go to sleep, get up tomorrow and do it all over only better. If you need absolution, go to a priest or give alms to the poor. Whatever ritual comforts you.' He tells him that guilt is pointless and irrelevant: 'I can't forgive you, Foreman, 'cause there's nothing to forgive'.

Dr House tells Wilson that he's taken in the dog.

At the end of the episode, Foreman visits his mother again. She notices that he looks sad and she hugs him. He tells her that he did something bad and she says she knows he didn't mean to hurt anyone. She says 'I forgive you. I forgive you'. But then Foreman realises that she doesn't know who he is. He says 'It's Eric' and she says 'Of course. My little boy's name is Eric'. As they continue to embrace, Foreman weeps.

Excerpts to watch:

The two scenes between Dr Foreman and Mrs Foreman

Dr Chase talks to Dr Foreman about prayer and Dr House talks to Foreman about forgiveness

The conversation between Dr Foreman and the patient as she is dying

Some questions:

What did the episode make you think about the way we make decisions?

What are the issues about how we cope with having made bad decisions?

How important is the support of friends and family when we make bad decisions?

What does this episode tell us about the issue of free will?

What does this episode tell us about the need for forgiveness and where do we look for it?

Do you agree with Dr House that guilt is pointless?

Do you agree with Dr Chase that we should pray and pretend that someone is listening?

What do you make of Dr Wilson's insistence that the human connection is so important?

Some bible passages:

Luke 15.18-24

John 7.53-8.11

Acts 13.38-39

Ephesians 1. 7-12

Psalm 32.1-2