

'Setbacks are just part of God's plan' - Doak on faith, football & frustrations.

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'I pray before games & read the bible on my own'

By Amy Canavan. BBC Sport Scotland. Published 12 March 2026.

Ben Gannon-Doak is sitting in a chapel with St Michael the Archangel around his neck.

"He protects you and keeps you safe from anything that might pull you away from God," the Scotland international explains. Temptations may have, unsurprisingly, caught the eye of the young boy who left home to become a Premier League player at 16 in days gone by. But now, having reconnected with his faith, Bournemouth attacker Gannon-Doak says he feels "grounded". "I think it's very easy to fall into the flash, social media side of things the higher the level," the 20-year-old revealed in a film for BBC Scotland's A View from the Terrace. "I think God just keeps you grounded and humble because he always tells us that we wouldn't have any of this without him. "I heavily rely on God to keep me strong."

'I heard God call me with urge to get back into it'

Strength is a non-negotiable in this game. Gannon-Doak found that out the hard way. As an injured teenager, living away from home, he discovered football can be a lonely place. Then, he rediscovered God. Brought up a Catholic, Gannon-Doak admits he "strayed away from it" for a while, before "hearing God call me, with an urge to get back into it".

Having played just 53 minutes over four appearances as a substitute in the Premier League this season, he picked up a third major injury in as many years with his hamstring left "hanging on by a thread" on the November night Scotland qualified for the World Cup.

"I've had a lot of struggles with injuries, and it can get quite lonely at times," says Gannon-Doak, who first tore his meniscus when playing for Liverpool Under-21s. "I just felt God calling me. I realised I started to feel a bit better and stronger and started coping better with things, and I just thought, 'oh, that's not a coincidence'. I think that's the way it happened for me." Since then, his outlook has shifted. Instead of viewing his three major operations as incidents to have "plagued" him, he views them as ones to "prepare". "It's made my body and mind stronger - I just feel like that's part of God's plan to prepare me

for something," Gannon-Doak, who had to pull out of Steve Clarke's squad for Euro 2024 added. "What that something is, I don't know, but it's made me who I am, the player I am.

"With every injury I've got I've coped with it better and better, and as I've grown into my faith it's got a lot easier because I know what's important now. "Football's not the be all and end all. I'd love to play for as long as I can, but if it ever feels like everything in my path is stopping me, maybe that's just the plan for me. "It's got a lot easier to cope with setbacks because setbacks aren't really setbacks anymore. It's just part of the plan.

"When you have God on your side, you know he's never going to forget about you, he's not going to abandon you." 'I pray before games & read the bible on my own' So, what does it look like in practise? For Gannon-Doak, it's a private devotion, which intensified due to an increase of passages and scriptures coming up on his phone. He's not "praying for hat-tricks". "I started off just praying - I didn't really know what else to do - and then all of a sudden my phone's just full of stuff with God and passages," he explained. "Then my gran got me my own Bible and I started reading that. If I ever saw something I didn't understand I'd look it up and write it down in a way that I better understood it and then I just kept doing that. "I'm praying before games; I read the Bible on my own - I won't really do that in the dressing room because there's a lot of different faiths in football. "It's also just better to do it in private as you can really focus. A dressing room can be quite chaotic at times, but it's at the root of everything, including my football." Though it's a personal reflection, Gannon-Doak is conscious it's his role - especially given his platform and fans' tendency to "worship" players - to "spread the word". "It's got easier and easier to be a bit bolder with my faith, because that's what God tells us to do," he added. "God tries to teach us humility. Obviously, we're in the public eye, we've been blessed with a platform to do the right things, to be good role models and to spread the word of God. "I wouldn't say we're idolised and worshipped, but I'd say we've got a platform to be good role models and for people to look up to." 'I had to just shut up and trust God'

Many will be hoping to look up to the winger when Scotland make their World Cup return this summer, in Group C with Brazil, Haiti and Morocco. Though Gannon-Doak only lasted 20 minutes in that epic match with Denmark in November, he more than played his part by lifting in the inch-perfect ball for Scott McTominay to score, arguably, Scotland's greatest goal of all time.

"It felt brilliant that he made me look decent... and made himself look even better," he said of the Napoli star's overhead kick. "I couldn't believe what Scotty had done. When all the lads just looked at each other, we were like, 'that's unbelievable.'" From the highest of highs to the lowest of lows in just over 15 minutes, he recalls in being a "rollercoaster". But one which God ensured was a safe ride. "My faith is my biggest support, so while I had one million things going through my mind - mostly 'why is this happening?' - I just had to shut up and trust God," he explained. "It's almost a kind of fight against myself to keep my mind on God and to remember all the things he tells us. But it was a rollercoaster, I must admit." It's a ride he believes he's coming to the end of, as the exciting live-wire insists he will "definitely" be fit come Clarke's tournament-squad announcement, but he will "not be rushing anything" by putting pressure on a return date. "I just want to make sure everything's good and that I'm fit and ready for the summer," he said. "Hopefully I can finish the season strong to set myself up for it."

"God brings that calmness."