



Hello everyone!

I hope each of you had a merry Christmas and a happy New Year! **TODAY'S THE DAY!!!** I will probably be on a plane in the middle of the Atlantic by the time you are reading this. I had some bittersweet goodbyes at the GTR airport. I will miss everyone I am leaving so very much. For this first newsletter, I want to talk about some of the challenges and blessings I've encountered to get to this point.

Before I start, I want to thank everyone who has supported me financially and/or spiritually up to this point. **You. Are. Awesome.** I could not have come this far without your prayers and your willingness to give to my mission fund. **THANK YOU!!!**

I'd say the biggest challenge was definitely my visa. It was a long, drawn-out process that I don't wish upon anyone. It was full of uncertainty and sleepless nights. The biggest nightmare was trying to schedule an appointment. The process took over a month and countless emails.

Here's how my experience went with the visa process and how you, too, can get an Italian study visa for the Miami region. It started with contacting the Mississippi Honorary Consulate. We called and asked if he was available to do the visa in his office in Hattiesburg, which would have been a 3-hour drive. He said he is not doing visas at this time and we would need to go to Miami. To schedule the Miami appointment, I had to stay up and wait until the times switched over on the Rome side.

That meant staying up until 1–4 a.m. (he didn't give a specific time, by the way), hoping there was an appointment available. **Pro Tip:** Wait between the times you check because you have to log in and get sent a verification code. Only then can you check the appointments. I found this out the hard way...

It was November 14th, and I stayed up until 1 a.m. I checked, and there weren't any times available. I waited until 2 a.m.—nothing. I waited until 3 a.m.—still nothing. At 4 a.m., I got locked out of my account for logging in too many times. As you can imagine, we were freaking out. It usually takes about 3 weeks to get the visa back, and with the holidays coming up, we were nervous. I emailed every person I could to figure out how to get it unlocked. It turned out that November 29th would be the day my account was unlocked...

I was very wary about checking the times after that. I decided to check, **on a whim**, on December 2nd. It was 5 p.m., and I logged in. Keep in mind that this was a Monday. I checked the times, and guess what... **THERE WAS A SLOT FOR FRIDAY THE 6TH!** I made sure to secure it as quickly as I could. For context, the time slots only go out 3 months ahead, and the next open time after the 6th was February 10th. Also, the only way slots open up is if someone cancels their appointment or does not check in. **God made sure that I was getting that visa.**

My dad volunteered to go with me to Miami that week. He found and bought the plane tickets, hotel, and car rental by the end of the night on Tuesday the 3rd. The rest of that week was spent packing and getting all my paperwork in order. I ended up getting the visa on December 20th. **The Lord is good!**

Speaking of plane tickets, I want to shout out David and Lisa Taylor. David decided he wanted to buy my plane ticket, and I can't describe how much that meant to me. Also, be sure to keep his wife and my cousin, Lisa, in your prayers. She is going through a lot of medical treatments and has been in the hospital since January 2nd. Please pray for her healing and for her to start the path to recovery soon. Pray that David continues to have strength, as he has stayed by her side through the entire process. Thank you.

I'll end with the timeline for when I land. The first couple of days will be spent doing a bunch of paperwork and getting settled in. I will be living in the Florence Bible School, which is also where I will be teaching. It was a former apartment building, so there is a lot of space. I will have my own room, but I will share a bathroom and a kitchen with my teammates. I will give more details about them if they are willing to share.

I plan on recording my journey over there and my thoughts along the way. The plan is to have an edited video up on my YouTube channel. In that video, I'll go over the struggles, answered prayers, and challenges I faced that week. I will record what I think is interesting and give commentary for the footage. I will do my best to edit the content in a way that is honest and shares what is going on in Florence.

Proverbs 16:3 says, **"Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established."** This has become my favorite verse because I have seen God working in so many aspects of this mission journey. From little things, like having enough cash for the shipment of my visa, to getting a call from the bank about my Euros coming in. That was a really cool thing because I was in the lobby of the bank when they called, and I just said, **"I'm here,"** to the lady on the phone. She looked up, very confused, until she saw my dad and me waving to her. That has **never** happened to me before and it hadn't to her either.

Anyway, seeing how many things have fallen into place and how supported I have been has strengthened my faith deeply. I am so excited to see what God will do when I arrive in Italy. I pray that I can be a shining light in the Florence community, as well as wherever I may visit. Thank you again for all your love and support.

With excitement and love,

Elijah Baine

