



# **S**trength *for the* Body & Soul

31 Recipes, Readings & Reflections

By Sharon Merz



Bladensburg, MD

Strength for the Body & Soul: 31 Readings, Recipes & Reflections

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## Author's Notes & Acknowledgments

# INTRODUCTION

Who knew that the inspiration for a book could come while cooking dinner? Apparently, God did.

It was my first time preparing Tamale Pie (recipe #18). As the ingredients started to come together, I couldn't help but notice how pretty and colorful the dish was becoming. As a fan of cooking shows, I hear often that "we eat with our eyes first," so I was optimistic that this new dish was a winner on that front. But then I thought about Eve and how she was tempted in the Garden of Eden because that fruit looked really tasty. (That's just how my mind works!) It was at that point that I was inspired to take two of my passions – everyday cooking and my devotions which often just reflect everyday life – and (gulp!) write my first book. It made so much sense as the Tamale Pie made its way into the baking dish. (For the record, it tastes as good as it looks!)

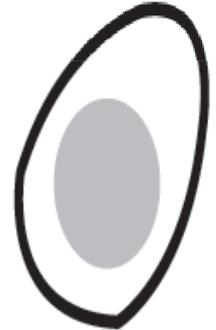
The recipe selection runs the gamut in terms of origin. A couple of them have been traditions in my family since I was a child, while some are recently-discovered gems. Several have been gleaned from community cookbooks, while others have been previously published and I'm grateful for the permissions to use those. I don't even remember where some of the recipes came from, and several of them have been tweaked multiple times to suit my style of cooking, which I refer to as "whatever I feel like making at the time!" No matter the source, I have personally enjoyed each of these recipes and am so delighted to be able to share them.

The greater joy comes in directing others to not only read the Bible, but also to reflect on how it applies to everyday life. Pull up a chair and sample how Joshua is connected to potato salad and James relates to roasted potatoes. It may be hard to imagine how Haggai is linked to a salmon and asparagus dish or Jeremiah to apple pie. But God's word has a lot to say about a lot of things that touch our everyday lives. As busy as life can be, time spent in God's word gives us the strength we need each day, and it can open our mind to the Lord showing us "great and unsearchable things that [we] do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3).

Ready? Let's dig in, and enjoy!

## Breakfast Casserole

- 1 pound bulk sausage, browned & cooled slightly
- 6 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 2 cups milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 6 slices bread, finely crumbled



Add beaten eggs to sausage, then combine remainder of ingredients. Mix all together & put in greased 9" x 13" pan. Refrigerate overnight. Bake in 350° oven for 45 minutes.

### Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5

One time I attended a college senior's piano recital. He played classical music beautifully for more than an hour without a single sheet in front of him. He drew a nice-sized audience and we all knew that this talented young man had truly spent years preparing for this special night!

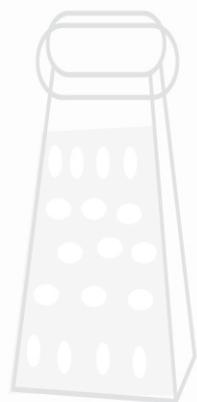
That same year I was really "getting into" the Advent season more than I previously had. I haven't always attended churches that put a lot of focus on Advent, but the church I attended at that time was putting an extra focus on it. In addition to the weekly lighting of Advent candles and listening to the corresponding readings, I personally was reading two Advent devotionals and had attended a Service of Lessons and Carols for the first time (which I highly recommend). Advent has to do with preparing for Christmas – for celebrating the day Jesus was born. I once heard someone say, "Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord."

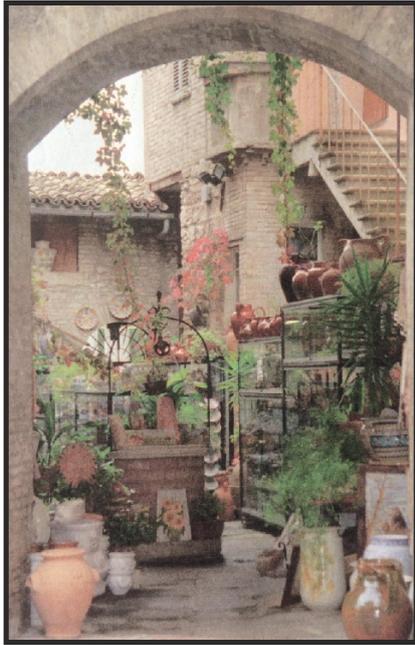
It makes sense to "be prepared" as the Scout motto declares. We should prepare for some of life's smaller tasks, like a school assignment or preparing to cook a dish. One example is this Breakfast Casserole, which is actually prepared the night before baking. We always prepare for the big things in our lives – piano recitals,

graduations, going to college, weddings, and the birth of babies. Preparing for the birth of the Holy Child should be no less important. Preparation makes us plan ahead. It makes us think carefully about what is about to happen and the impact it will have on our lives.

God Himself knew the world needed to prepare for the arrival of Jesus. In comforting God's people, the prophet Isaiah wrote: "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God...'" (Isaiah 40:3) The Message translation says: "Prepare for God's arrival!" This was a prophecy about John the Baptist, and he knew his role in God's plan. Matthew 3:11 records his words: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." John the Baptist had prepared himself, and fulfilled his role of helping others get ready for Christ's coming.

Get ready – Christmas is coming, no matter what time of year it actually is! It is a wonderful time to celebrate, for it is at that time that we focus on Emmanuel, which means "God with us." Can you think of a more blessed event? I can't. Be prepared!





Photographer Vicky Pannella says she took this picture of the entrance to a flower shop in Assisi, Italy, not just because of the beauty and colorful presentation. She was struck by how inviting it looked, and how the elements collectively and compellingly seemed to say, "Come in!" That's the hope of **Strength for the Body & Soul** – to compel you to enter so you can share the experience the recipes, readings, and reflections invite. May the packages presented make you crave more than the recipes so you can seek out greater fulfillment in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

*“Taste and see that the Lord is good;  
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.”*  
**Psalm 34:8**

**SHARON MERZ** considers herself to be a typical Midwesterner, who just happens to “think devotionally.” She loves seeing God in the everyday, and how there is continual proof that He is relevant to contemporary living. With a bachelor’s degree in Journalism from Eastern Illinois University, she has spent her adult life working in newspapers and printing. She currently lives in Central Ohio with her husband, Dave.

