

Rosa Parks



Biography Timeline – **February 4, 1913**, born Rosa McCauley, daughter of James McCauley, a carpenter, and Leona (Edwards) McCauley, a teacher, Tuskegee, Alabama; baptized as an infant in the African Methodist Episcopal Church; attends AME church third Sunday of each month, attends Baptist church on other Sundays; when parents separate moves with her mother and brother Sylvester to Pine Level, Alabama, near Montgomery, where she grows up on maternal grandparents' farm; **1918**, attends elementary school in Pine Level, Alabama; **1924**, attends Industrial School for Girls in Montgomery, Alabama; **1929**, leaves school to care for grandmother; later stays home also to care for her mother; **December, 1932**, marries Raymond Parks in Pine Level, Alabama; **1934**, receives high school diploma; **December, 1943**, becomes secretary of the Montgomery NAACP; **1943**, tries to register to vote and is denied; is forced off bus for the first time for not entering at the back door; **1944**, is again denied the opportunity to register to vote; **1945**, finally receives certificate for voting; **1949**, becomes adviser to the NAACP Youth Council; **Summer, 1955**, attends workshop at Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee, for the first time; **August, 1955**, meets the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.; **December 1, 1955**, is arrested for not yielding her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus; **December 5, 1955**, stands trial and is found guilty; attends meeting of a group who have formed the Montgomery Improvement Association; Montgomery bus boycott begins; **January, 1956**, loses job at Montgomery Fair department store; **February 21, 1956**, re-indicted for boycotting; **November 13, 1956**, segregation on buses declared unconstitutional by U.S. Supreme Court; **December 21, 1956**, boycotters return to buses; **1957**, moves to Detroit; **August 28, 1963**, attends civil rights march on Washington; speaks at annual convention of Southern Christian Leadership Convention; **March, 1965**, participates in Selma-to-Montgomery civil rights march; **1965**, begins working for Congressman John Conyers in Detroit; **1977**, husband Raymond Parks, dies; brother Sylvester McCauley dies; **1979**, mother Leona McCauley, dies; receives Spingarn Medal, NAACP's highest honor; **1987**, cofounds the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, with Elaine Steele; **September, 1988**, retires from working for John Conyers; **February 28, 1991**, bust of Rosa Parks is unveiled at Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; **1992**, meets Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, founder and president of Soka Gakkai International; **1992**, publishes her first book, *Rosa Parks: My Story* with Jim Haskins; **1994**, trip to Japan; receives honorary doctorate degree/Soka University; **1994**, trip to Stockholm, Sweden, to receive Rosa Parks Peace Prize and light the Peace Candle; publishes *Quiet Strength: The Faith, the Hope, and the Heart of a Woman Who Changed a Nation* with Gregory J. Reed; **1995**, fortieth anniversary, Montgomery bus boycott; **1996**, receives Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Clinton; **1999**, receives Congressional Gold Medal; **2000**, Rosa Parks Library and Museum dedicated on campus of Troy University, Montgomery, Alabama; **October 24, 2005**, dies in Detroit, Michigan; **October 29, 2005**, coffin flown to Montgomery where she lies in repose at St. Paul A.M.E. Church; **October 31, 2005**, casket transported to Washington, D.C., where she lies in honor in the U.S. Capitol, with 50,000 viewing; memorial service at Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church; **November 1-2, 2005**, coffin lies in repose at Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit, Michigan; **November 2, 2005**, funeral at the Greater Grace Temple Church, Detroit, Michigan, last seven hours, with 4,000 in attendance; interred next to her husband and mother in mausoleum, Woodlawn Cemetery, Detroit, Michigan; **February 27, 2013**, statue of Rosa Parks is placed in U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall.

In the tradition of Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Phillis Wheatley, Ida B.

Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Marian Anderson, Rosa Parks would add her efforts

to further civil rights for African-Americans with an act great courage. In a simple act of nonviolent resistance in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955, she would ignite a protest against racial segregation in the U.S. and its racist foundation. Thereafter she would be known as "The Mother of the Civil Rights Movement."

Rosa Parks would later say that she defiantly refused to give up her seat on the bus on that day because she was tired, spiritually and existentially, because she *"did not want to be continually humiliated over something I had no control over: the color of my skin."*(1)

Parks' bold witness was founded on the courage she had garnered from involvement in institutions like the N.A.A.C.P., training she had received at Highlander Folk School, and by years of devoted practice of her deep Christian faith. As a child, each day, before supper, there would be daily devotions, with her grandmother reading the Bible and her grandfather praying. Her mother also played a strong part in her faith, teaching her simple insights that lasted a lifetime. Chief among the adages she learned from her mother was the proverbial wisdom of *"If you live life yard by yard, it sure is hard. But if you live it inch by inch, life's a cinch."*(2)

Parks maintained all through her life that the book of Psalms was her favorite book in the Bible, particularly Psalm 27:1-7. Among her favorite hymns were *"Woke Up This Morning With My Mind Stayed on Jesus;" "I Am Bound for the Promised Land;" "O Freedom Over Me."*

For Rosa Park the church was the foundation of her community, as it had been for centuries for the African-American community. In the Church, she found refuge, inspiration, haven, and information. Meeting, praying, singing, reading Scripture, giving

testimony, helping others, provided the strength she needed to resist hatred, violence, and injustice.

In a tense moment in her life, after being arrested in 1955 in Montgomery for refusing to give up her bus seat, Parks told interviewer Douglas Brinkley, she was sitting her a pew in her church, St. Paul A.M.E. when she experienced a “[t]rue peace of mind” sweeping over her as a blessing from God.(3) The holy visitation confirmed her bold action and strengthened her resolve for the further work required for the fulfillment of civil rights for all people.

Because of Park’s upbringing, the gifts of the Bible, and the great sustenance provided by the Church, she could live a life of steadfast gratitude. *"I am always grateful for each day God has given me."*(4)

Praying with Rosa Parks – Suggestions for Use

Day 1 Pray the first verse of Psalm 27 – *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?* Say it at least three times this day.

Day 2 Memorize one your favorite Psalms, or a verse from a Psalm, and pray it several times throughout the day.

Day 3 Set a time each day, either morning or early evening, for reading short portions of the Bible (such as a Psalm each day), then take fifteen minutes to pray, using the themes and thoughts suggested in the Bible reading as your guide.

Day 4 Recall Rosa Park’s mother’s wisdom: "If you live life yard by yard, it sure is hard. But if you live it inch by inch, life’s a cinch." Now consider the three top problems/dilemmas/challenges in your life:

- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____

Note the "yard-by-yard solutions you're using to solve them. Now ask yourself, "What are some new inch-by-inch solutions that God might suggest"?

Day 5 Pray today by humming or singing a favorite song or hymn that relates to God's grace-filled provision of care for you. If you know the words of the song well, speak them aloud as a prayer of gratitude for such provision.

Day 6 Begin this day with a prayer of thanksgiving for your earthly persisting through the night into a brand new day. At midday, say a prayer of thanks for the activities that have been set to your hands. At the close of day, give thanks to God for the encounters that have enriched your life this day.

Day 7 Ponder today what new training you might need for your walk of faith. Recall that Rosa Parks was a life-long learner when it came to living out her faith.

NOTES

- 1 Rosa Parks, with Gregory J. Reed, *Quiet Strength: The Faith, the Hope, and the Heart of a Woman Who Changed a Nation*(Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), pp. 65-66.
- 2 Parks and Reed, *Quiet Strength* , p. 57.
- 3 Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks: A Life* (New York: Lipper/Viking, 2000), p. 150.
- 4 Parks and Reed, *Quiet Strength* , p. 86.

FOR FURTHER READING, STUDY, AND REFLECTION

Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks: A Life* (New York: Lipper/Viking, 2000)

Joyce A. Hanson, *Rosa Parks: A Biography* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2011)

Rosa Parks, with Gregory J. Reed, *Quiet Strength: The Faith, the Hope, and the Heart of a Woman Who Changed a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994)

Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013)