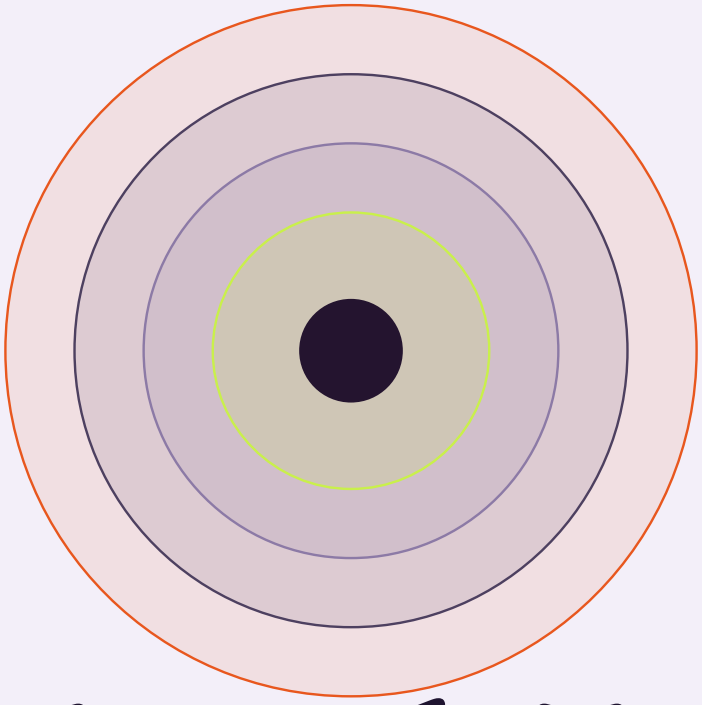


The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy — What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next

Rendezvous with Destiny

A reading of the book by William Strauss and Neil Howe (1997)

1. ACTION BOOK

CONTENTS

Inside this edition

The book in a minute 4

The takeaways 5

Your action book 7

Before you go 8

PART TWO · THE ACTION BOOK

The setup checklist 10

Read one book from another turning each season 11

Test the theory against the news 12

Give one hour a month to something civic 13

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy — What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

William Strauss and Neil Howe were American writers who studied generations, and their earlier book Generations (1991) set out the pattern this one builds on. The Fourth Turning argues that Anglo-American history moves in a cycle, the saeculum, roughly the length of a long human life. Each saeculum has four turnings of about twenty years: a High, an Awakening, an Unraveling and a Crisis, which the authors compare to spring, summer, autumn and winter. Four generational archetypes, Prophet, Nomad, Hero and Artist, age through these turnings in rotation, and the authors argue that their changing roles drive the cycle. The book traces the pattern back through English and American history, from the Wars of the Roses to the Depression and the Second World War, and forecasts that the United States would enter a new Crisis early in the twenty-first century. Many historians treat it as a provocative theory rather than established fact.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The authors see history as a cycle of seasons, not a straight line of progress or a random string of events.

Strauss and Howe contrast three ways of seeing time: linear, chaotic and cyclical. They argue that modern people lean on the first two and miss the third. Their cycle, the saeculum, lasts about as long as a long human life, roughly 80 to 100 years.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A turning is a mood that lasts about twenty years, and four of them make one full cycle.

The High, the Awakening, the Unraveling and the Crisis each have a typical feel. A High trusts institutions and distrusts individualism; an Unraveling flips that around. The authors line the four up with spring, summer, autumn and winter.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

In the book's reading, a Crisis tears down the old civic order and builds a new one around a shared threat.

The authors put the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Depression and Second World War in this slot. Each began with a shock, deepened, and ended with institutions rebuilt. They argue the mood that follows is usually confident and collective.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The season you are born into shapes the archetype the authors assign you.

Prophets are born in a High, Nomads in an Awakening, Heroes in an Unraveling and Artists in a Crisis. The archetypes are broad tendencies across a generation, not personality types for any one person. You can disagree with your own label and still find the frame useful.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Each generation tends to correct the excesses of the one that raised it.

The authors argue that children raised loosely in one era tend to raise their own children more protectively, and the reverse. They point to the latchkey childhoods of Generation X and the closer supervision many Millennials grew up with. That swing, repeated, is part of what keeps the cycle turning.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The cycle is driven by people ageing into new roles, not by any single event.

In the theory, each generation moves through four life phases of about twenty years: childhood, young adulthood, midlife and elderhood. When every generation steps up a phase at once, the mood of the whole society shifts. That is why the authors tie turnings so closely to generations.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

An Awakening argues about values, and the Crisis that follows decides which ones get built into institutions.

The authors see the 1960s and 1970s as an Awakening, when young people challenged the order built after the war. They argue that the ideals argued over then become the agenda the same generation pushes as elders in the next Crisis.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

You cannot skip a season, but you can prepare for it.

The book closes with advice for households as well as nations. Its spirit is plain: keep reserves, strengthen ties with family and neighbours, and build skills that hold their value in hard years. That advice stands whether or not you accept the cycle.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Use the saeculum as a lens for questions, not as a calendar of the future.

Many historians criticise the theory as too neat and hard to disprove, because almost any event can be fitted into some turning. HourLife's view is that its value lies in asking how your generation's start in life shaped what feels normal to you, not in dating the next war.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Place yourself on the wheel
- [ ] Map four generations of your family
- [ ] Interview an elder about their twenties
- [ ] Start a hard-year reserve
- [ ] Write a one-page winter plan

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Read one book from another turning each season
- ◯ Test the theory against the news
- ◯ Give one hour a month to something civic

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Place yourself on the wheel

Enter your birth year in the saeculum wheel on this page.

Write down the archetype and turning it gives you, then one way it fits you and one way it does not.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Map four generations of your family

Write down the birth years of a grandparent, a parent, yourself and a child or niece.

For each, note what the world felt like when they turned twenty.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Interview an elder about their twenties

Ask someone over seventy what people trusted when they were young: the government, banks, churches, employers.

Write down three things that surprised you.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Start a hard-year reserve

Set up an automatic transfer, however small, into a separate savings account this week.

Name it after the hard year it is for.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Write a one-page winter plan

List the five people you would call in a bad year, the skills you could earn from, and the costs you could cut first.

Keep it where you can find it.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Read one book from another turning each season

Pick a history or memoir from a period the authors call a different turning.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Test the theory against the news

Once a week, pick one headline and ask which turning the authors would file it under.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Give one hour a month to something civic

Volunteer, join a local board meeting or help a neighbourhood group.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

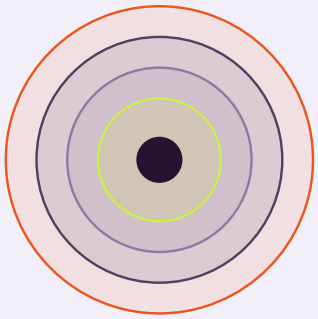
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



You cannot choose your season, but you can choose how ready you are when it turns.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER STRAUSS AND HOWE

Read it online, and vote on the take-aways: hourlife.com/books/the-fourth-turning

The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy — What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny · The reader's edition

Made November 6, 2026 · HourLife, hourlife.com