

## Why You Should Work the Scene in Street Photography

### What's poppin', people? It's Dante.

Today I'm going to be discussing *why you should work the scene in street photography*. This is one of those tips that I believe has played a major role in the success I've had.

I'm sharing the love and the wisdom I've learned over the years—looking at behind-the-scenes footage, contact sheets, and reflecting on how I've used this method personally. By the end of this, you'll have a deeper understanding of:

- **How to work the scene**
- **Why you should work the scene**
- **How it can level up your street photography**

***“Don't leave the scene—let the scene leave you.”***

A lot of the best photos come through *patience, persistence*, and letting the moment unfold naturally. You've got to be both fast and observant like a hunter **and** patient, aware, present.

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### What It Means to Work the Scene

Working the scene is more than a technique—it's a *mindset, a philosophy, a way of being*.

It's the opposite of the one-and-done click. Instead of snapping and leaving, you stay. You follow through. You **squeeze** everything out of a moment.

You:

- Spend time at a scene
- Change your angles
- Adjust your body
- Watch how the background and people interact

***“The composition derives through your intuition the moment you press the shutter—but that moment doesn’t always come right away.”***

Your body must relate to the scene and the background if you want to walk away with something compelling.

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### **Case Study: Zambia, Africa**

Here’s the contact sheet from a photo I made in Zambia during my Peace Corps service with the Bemba tribe.

I waited outside a Seventh Day Adventist Church camp. The *brick wall*, the *blue stripe*, the *geometric shapes*—all of it had potential. So I set myself up at a **choke point**—where people were coming in and out.

***“By positioning yourself at choke points, you can set your stage.”***

That scene became layered: **foreground, middle ground, background**—through micro movements and constant adjustments. I wasn’t forcing it. I just stayed present. Let the people fall into place.

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### **Debunking the Myth of the Decisive Moment**

We’ve romanticized the decisive moment—like one click makes the masterpiece.

Truth is:

***“Most great shots are built from 10, 20, 50—even hundreds of frames.”***

You *earn* those images. The price is **patience**.

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### **Golden Hour, Shadows, and Play**

During golden hour in Zambia, kids were playing on an empty frame. The light was stunning. Shadows were long. Everything was moving fast.

And still, I stayed.

I shot through the moment. Even when I already had a strong image, I kept going.

***“I didn’t leave the scene until the scene left me.”***

I adjusted my body, got close, stepped back. The photo I walked away with was full of mystery—the heat, the sun, the light, the shadow. That was the subject, not just the kids.

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### **Extended Immersion: The Baptism Scene**

Some scenes don’t unfold in minutes. They take **weeks**.

At that same church camp, I spent two weeks sleeping under thatched roofs. At the end came the baptism. I was **knee-deep in water**, immersed in the experience, when the photo happened.

***“I immersed myself in the culture, and the photo came naturally.”***

I noticed the preacher's **gesture**—his hand raised to the sky. That gesture changed everything. I dropped low, changed my angle, waited.

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## Composition Comes from Intuition

Let's talk about Israel and Palestine. I photographed the wall that separates them. But it took **weeks** of returning to the same location.

There weren't many people around. It was desolate.

Then one day, I caught the boy throwing the stroller. The wall, the gesture, the chaos—all came together. And not because I planned every line.

***“Composition is intuition.”***

I didn't think, “Let me find leading lines.” I *moved my body*, responded to life, and the composition appeared.

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## Real-World Tip:

- **Don't just stand still.**
- **Move your body.**
- **Change your angle.**
- **Relate yourself to the background.**

This is how you make a striking photograph. Not with rules, but with **presence**.

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## Return to the Scene

Another tip: *return to the same locations again and again.*

Here's a **bus stop in Philly** I've shot many times. I saw potential: the way light strikes at a certain time, the people moving in and out.

I treated it like **visual problem solving**:

1. Light
2. Shadow
3. Silhouette
4. Human energy

***“Photography is visual problem solving—putting together the puzzle pieces of life.”***

That photo only came together because I was there, adjusting and layering: foreground, middle ground, background.

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## Jericho and the Cigarette

I hiked through the desert in Jericho with some brothers. We were relaxing by the water after hours of walking. Then, spontaneously, *that moment* unfolded.

A boy smoking a cigarette. And I was ready.

***“Courage is staying present and allowing the moment to unfold.”***

Courage isn't being fearless. It's holding your ground, trusting the moment will arrive, and being ready when it does.

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## Photography Is a Reflection of Courage

*“Photographs are a reflection of your heart, of your soul.”*

The word courage comes from *cor*—meaning **heart**.

You have to go out there, be present, and stand on the front lines of life.

That’s how you make something real.

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## Study Your Contact Sheets

One last thing:

- **Review your contact sheets**
- **Analyze your tendencies**
- **Notice patterns**
- **See what moments you gravitate toward**

*“You’ll see how you move. You’ll see how you compose. And you’ll grow.”*

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## Final Thoughts

**Working the scene = patience, presence, physicality.**

*“Never leave the scene—let the scene leave you.”*

You’re not trying to force anything. You’re just *there*, letting it unfold.

So find:

- **Choke points**
- **Street corners**
- **Marketplaces**
- **Bus stops**

Places where people converge. Then, work the scene. Put yourself in relationship to the background. Stay patient. Let the photograph come.

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Thanks for watching today's video.  
I hope these thoughts help you grow your photography.

**Peace.**