

5 CURIOSITY PROMPTS

*FOR YOUR NEXT SOLO
PHOTO WALK*



MATTHEW NORTON

INTRODUCTION

Photography has a way of speeding us up when what we actually need is to slow down. Most of our best images come from moments we didn't rush, moments we allowed ourselves to notice. That's what this guide is for.

5 Curiosity Prompts for Your Next Solo Photo Walk is a simple tool to help you reconnect with the part of photography that quietly holds everything together — your attention. These prompts aren't about perfection or performance; they're about learning to see again, to listen again, and to create from a place that feels honest.

Whether you've been photographing for 10 weeks or 10 years, curiosity is still the doorway back to meaning. My hope is that these small practices give you a reason to slow down, breathe a little deeper, and notice what's already waiting for you on the other side of your lens.

Take this with you the next time you step outside. Use one prompt or all of them. Let them teach you something about your surroundings — and maybe something about yourself.

Let's begin.

PROMPT 1

THE ONE-MINUTE NOTICE

Sometimes curiosity shows up in a small pause — the moment you stop and finally notice what the world is already offering you. That's the heart of the One-Minute Notice.

Before you take a single photo, give yourself 60 seconds to be fully present. No scrolling. No searching for “the shot.” Just noticing. If you need to, extend it to 5 minutes.

The rule isn't the length — the rule is presence. Because the more you notice, the more honestly you create. And the more honestly you create, the more human your photos will feel.

This is why those nostalgic photos of an un-tidied living room — toys on the floor, mail on the table, a portrait taken among the real shape of a real life — affect us so deeply. Nothing is staged. Nothing is pretending. Everything belongs. Truth has a way of making the viewer lean in. A One-Minute Notice teaches you to see that same truth in the wild.

How to Practice It

- Set a timer.
- Stand still.
- Breathe.

This will enable you to let your eyes scan without searching. You'll start to notice the nearest shadows and where they stop. Notice the temperature of the light — warm, cool, or something else. Maybe you'll notice a repeating pattern (brickwork, fence posts, leaf clusters, crosswalk lines). You might notice a car passing by, a cyclist, a dog tugging its leash, a flag pulling against the wind. Motion reveals energy. Stillness reveals structure. Both are worth learning.

By the end of 60 seconds, you've tuned your senses to the environment instead of your expectations. Now your photographs aren't guesses. They're responses. When you finally lift your camera, you'll make images in conversation with the moment, not separate from it.

PROMPT 2

THE NEAREST LIGHT TEST

Before you begin a photo walk, choose one simple assignment: *Find the nearest source of light — and let it teach you something.*

Light shapes everything you're about to see. It decides contrast, color, emotion, and clarity. Most photographers rush through it. Great photographers begin with it.

The Nearest Light Test slows you down long enough to understand not just where the light is coming from, but what the light is doing. Is it soft? Harsh? Directional? Bouncing off glass? Coloring the scene? Hiding something worth noticing?

Light is always telling the truth about a space. Learning to read it before lifting your camera means your photos will feel intentional instead of accidental.

How to Practice It

- Stop.
- Ask: "Where is the nearest light coming from?"
- Follow it with your eyes and see what it touches.

Maybe it grazes the edge of a brick wall, revealing texture. Maybe it's bouncing off a parked car, adding a shimmer you would've missed. Maybe it's cutting across someone's coat, shaping a moment without asking permission. When you understand the light, the rest of the scene starts speaking more clearly.

PROMPT 3

THE 3-FRAME STORY

Every environment you enter holds a story — even if it doesn't look like one. The goal isn't to find drama; the goal is to find sequence.

The 3-Frame Story forces you to stop expecting a perfect shot and instead recognize how small shifts create meaning. It's not about subjects. It's about change. These 3 frames don't have to be impressive. They just need to relate to one another. Together, they reveal the rhythm of the space you're standing in.

How to Practice It

- Choose one location.
- Take 3 images in the same direction — without moving your feet.
- Let each frame notice something different.

Frame 1 might anchor the scene: the doorway, the corner, the skyline.

Frame 2 might react to movement: a person walking through, a car rolling past, a bird cutting the frame.

Frame 3 might lean into detail: texture, shadow, a small object previously unseen.

You're not documenting beauty — you're documenting progression. You're teaching your eyes to see how moments evolve, and how stillness still contains motion if you look long enough.

PROMPT 4

THE UNIMPORTANT OBJECT

Some of the best photographers in the world learned to see by studying the things nobody else cared about: a lazy alleycat, a faded mural, a pole covered in stickers.

The Unimportant Object exercise trains your eye to recognize hidden potential — the things that quietly shape the atmosphere of a place. When you can make something “unimportant” feel meaningful, every other part of your photography gets stronger.

This practice isn’t about making something beautiful. It’s about making something noticed.

How to Practice It

- Pick an object most people would ignore.
- Walk around it once.
- Take one photo from the angle that makes it feel like it matters.

Maybe the light is hitting the corner just right. Maybe the shadow it casts feels bigger than it is. Maybe the color contrasts with the pavement. Maybe you realize it tells the truth about the space more honestly than anything else around it.

When you learn to give small things recognition, you learn to give big moments honesty.

PROMPT 5

THE SOUND OF THE SPACE

This prompt teaches you something surprising: Your ears improve your photographs.

Sound informs atmosphere. It shapes how we perceive tension, calmness, movement, and even light. You don't photograph sound directly — but you do photograph its effect.

When you pay attention to the soundscape around you, your composition choices become more emotional and more intentional. This is one of the fastest ways to become a more responsive photographer.

How to Practice It

- Close your eyes for 10 seconds.
- Listen for layers: foreground, midground, background.
- Open your eyes — and photograph what the sound makes you feel.

Maybe you hear a distant train and suddenly notice the industrial lines around you. Maybe you hear kids laughing and realize the warm light feels playful, too. Maybe you hear nothing at all — which makes you lean into minimalism.

Sound doesn't tell you what to shoot. It tells you what the moment wants to say.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Curiosity doesn't end when the walk is over.

It follows you home. It lingers in the small things — the shift in afternoon light, the quiet of a hallway, the way ordinary moments start revealing themselves before you're even looking for them.

If these 5 prompts helped you slow down, pay attention, or see your surroundings with a little more honesty, then you've already stepped into the heart of what my new book *Deeply Curious* is all about: creating from presence, not pressure — and learning to notice again.

This PDF is just a beginning.

Deeply Curious goes further. It unpacks the mindset, the rhythm, and the inner conversation of a photographer who wants more than sharp images — someone who wants their work to mean something.

If today's walk felt different...

If your camera felt a little lighter...

If something in you woke back up...

Then you're exactly who I wrote the full guide for.

Deeply Curious is coming soon. I can't wait for you to read it.

— Matthew Norton

