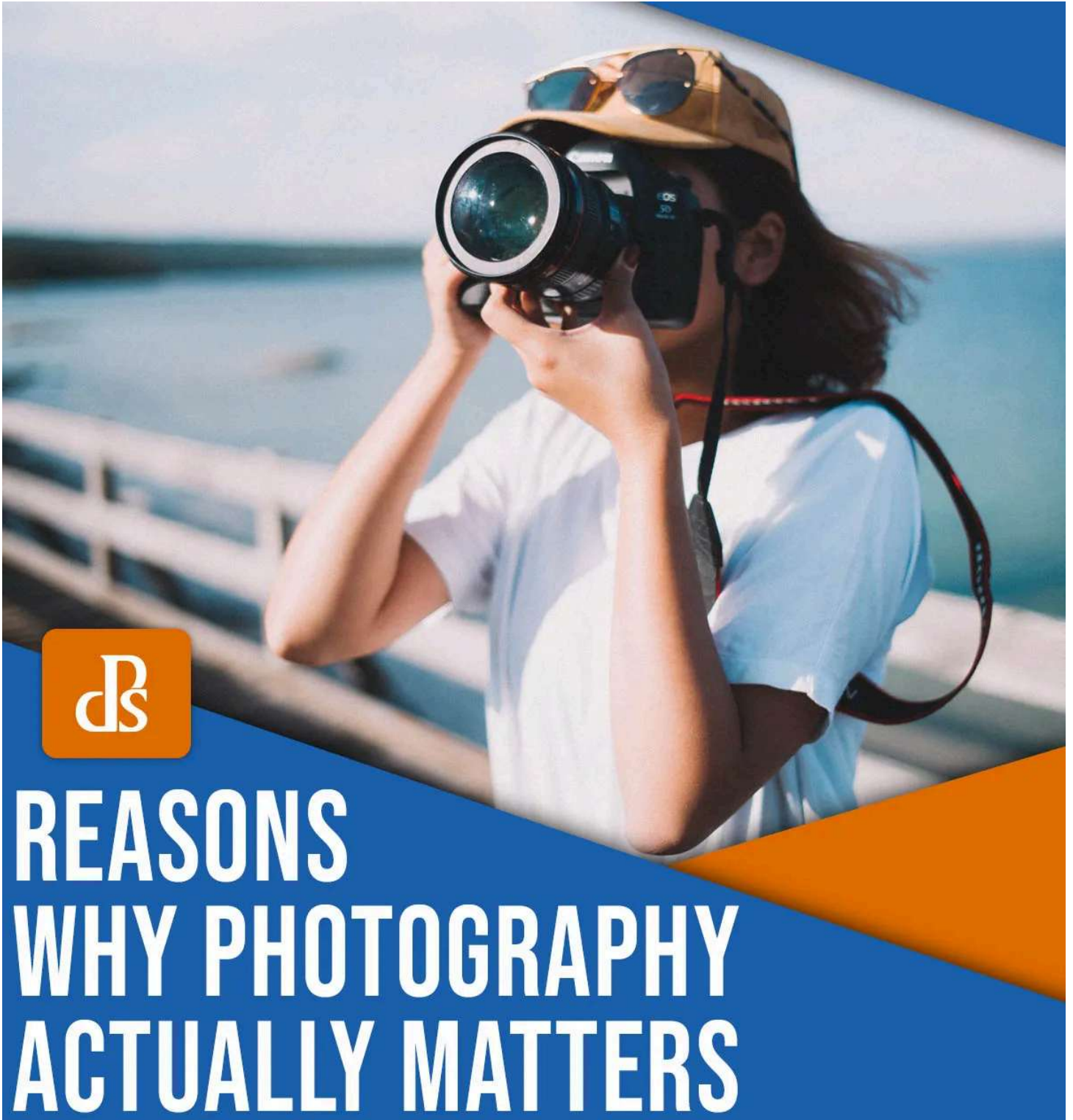


9 Reasons Why Photography Matters

Guest Contributor

13-16 minutes



Why does photography matter?

It's a question that we all ask at one time or another. After all, why do we keep waking up at 4:00 AM to [photograph the sunrise](#), when we could be warm and comfortable lying in bed? Why do we spend long hours tweaking our [compositions](#) and learning about [photography fundamentals](#) when we could be watching television or out with friends?

And some days, when we have no creativity at all and pressing the shutter button seems like the hardest thing in the world, we continue to persevere – but why? What is it about photography that's so compelling?

What motivates us to keep going?

In this article, I'm going to share nine reasons why I think photography matters. Hopefully, these ideas will help you find clarity and motivation – and will encourage you to capture images, even when it feels like everything is pointless and you should put down the camera forever.

Let's get started.

1. Photography helps us see the beauty in a complex world



Life isn't always picture-perfect. Sometimes it's chaotic, sometimes it's overwhelming, and sometimes it's just plain tough. But even amidst the clutter and the struggle, there

are glimmers of beauty waiting to be found. That's where your camera can be a transformative tool.

Photography trains your eye to search for those glimmers. When you look through the lens, you're not just composing a shot; you're actively seeking out the beauty in a world that desperately needs it. The petals on a rain-soaked flower, the warm hues of a sunset, or the joyful smile of a loved one all become focal points of wonder and appreciation.

Being able to capture that beauty serves a dual purpose. First, it provides a moment of solace, a brief escape from the turmoil around us. Second, it creates a lasting reminder that even when the world seems dark, there's always light somewhere. Your photographs can be those beacons, encouraging you and others to find beauty even in the mundane.

So keep shooting, even when the world seems too complicated to handle. Your lens can act like a sieve, filtering out the ugliness and leaving only the beauty. In doing so, you'll find that the world, despite its flaws, is still full of wonder that's worth capturing, worth cherishing.

2. Our photographs tell us what is important to us



When you ask people what possessions they would rescue from their burning house, one of the most frequent answers is a photograph album or a computer with all their digital images.

Interesting, isn't it? We would grab photos instead of valuable jewelry, even in moments of panic.

This impulse to save our recorded memories is a powerful force, one that tells us much about the role of photography in our lives – and speaks to our constant desire to distill our most precious moments into images.

We preserve the important events and people in our lives. The ceremonies of birth and birthdays, marriages and anniversaries, holidays and new houses are all recorded because they matter.

Photographs are a timeline of our lives filled with faces and places that we love. They are our story, which we can then share with others.

Ultimately, the thousands of images we take form a narrative of our lives.

3. Photography documents the world as it is



We live in a whirlwind. One moment you're a kid playing in the yard, and the next, you're an adult with responsibilities. The world doesn't stop, not for a second. Ever noticed how

quickly cars evolve, or how skylines change? It's dizzying. But here's where photography swoops in like a time-traveling superhero.

Capturing the world through a lens allows us to freeze moments in time. It's not just about historical landmarks or world events; photography can document the little things too. Think about your childhood home, or the car you drove in college. Photos make them immortal, forever etched in the frame.

When you snap a picture of your family gathered around the dinner table, you're doing more than creating a memento. You're documenting a piece of life as it was at that exact moment. These snapshots become invaluable treasures, letting future generations peek into the world we once knew.

Photographs serve as visual textbooks, offering lessons about life, society, and the ever-changing world around us. They can reveal how fashion has evolved, or how a neighborhood has transformed over the decades. It's not just nostalgia; it's a record of human history on both grand and intimate scales.

I encourage you to wield your camera like a historian. Because when you capture that fleeting sunset or the laughter in someone's eyes, you're doing something profound. You're documenting the world as it is, a world that will never quite be the same again.

4. Photographs are part of our legacy



I remember sitting on a train as it passed a playground where children were standing at attention for the annual school photograph. In the front row sat the teachers, and behind them, hundreds of children were neatly preened and uniformed. For the briefest second, the entire assembly was motionless. We passed just as the photographer clicked the shutter.

Then, as if in slow motion, the huge group scattered as children escaped their enforced immobility. The neat rows dissolved and broke down into individuals who were kicking balls or huddled with friends.

None of those children realized that the photograph was probably going to outlive them. A couple of generations later, the school photo might resurface among old papers in an attic, and someone would search for their grandfather among the fresh, young faces.

Photographs matter because they freeze moments of our lives that pass unremarkably and which seem to have little importance to us at the time. The significance of a photo might not even be *ours* – instead, it might be for others who search for the person we once were or the places we once knew.

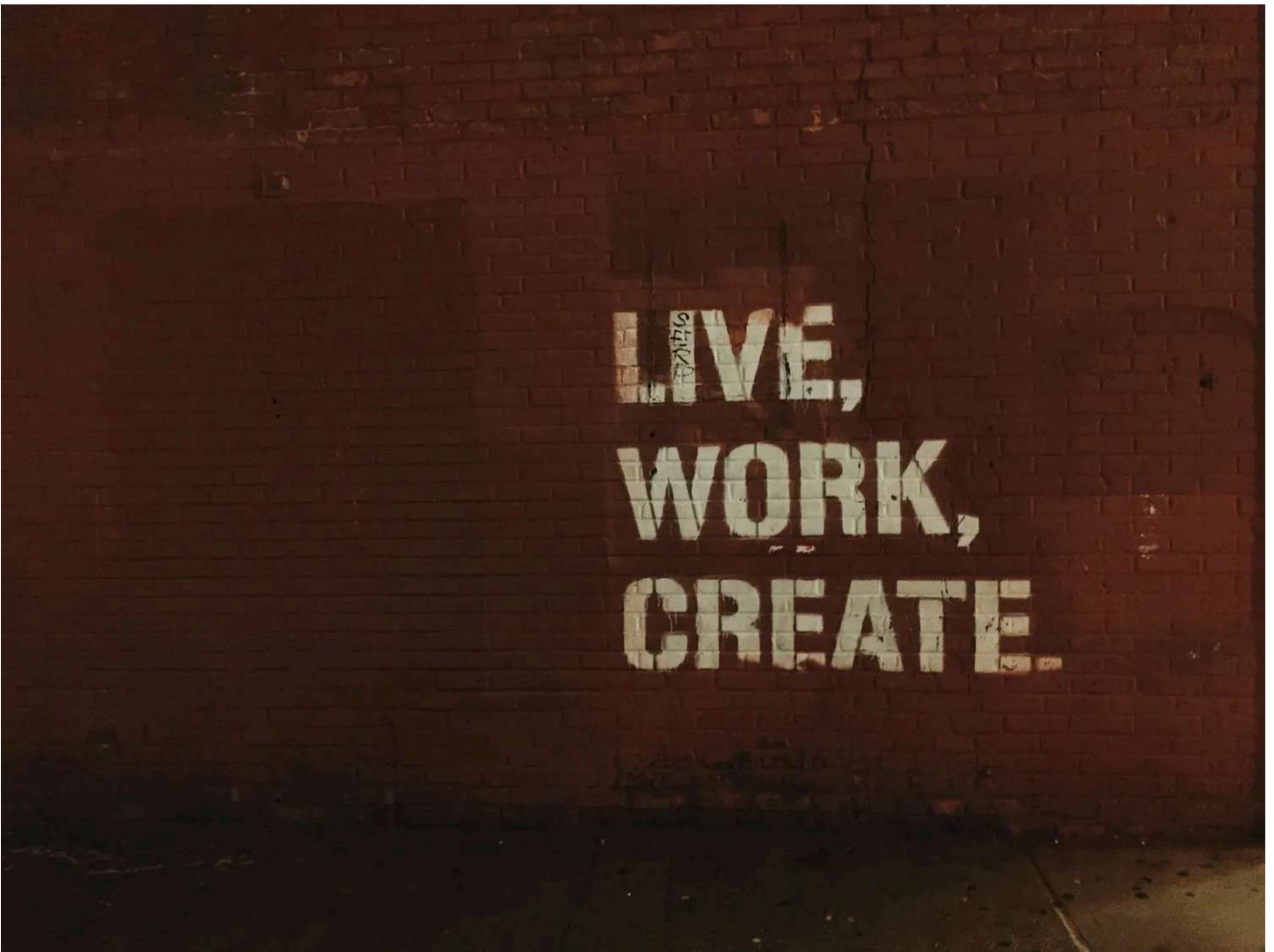
Each photo can be a small piece of a jigsaw that completes the larger picture of our lives.

Images are much more than a simple record. Photography speaks to the best and most generous part of our human nature – the desire to share what we find beautiful and interesting with others.

You only have to look at the multitude of [photo-sharing sites](#) to see this impulse at work, where millions of people share their personal, passionate, and sometimes quirky take on the world around them.

In other words, our images can share our lives with strangers. How powerful is that?

6. Photography makes us artists



Art isn't limited to galleries and concert halls. In fact, you don't need to be a traditional artist to create something awe-inspiring. That's the magic of photography. With a camera in hand, anyone can be an artist.

Think of your lens as your paintbrush. The frame is your canvas, and light is your palette. You have the freedom to compose shots that evoke emotion, tell a story, or simply dazzle

the eye. It's an art form that's accessible yet deeply personal, allowing you to project your vision onto the world.

We all have a unique way of seeing things. The way you frame a sunset, capture a smile, or even focus on a single raindrop can reveal your personality. Your perspective becomes your artistry, setting you apart in a sea of creators.

So, don't underestimate the power of the photos you take. Whether you capture landscapes or portraits, whether you shoot in black and white or vibrant color, you're making art. You're transforming ordinary scenes into extraordinary visual narratives.

Take pride in your work. Display it, share it, celebrate it. You're an artist, with your very own gallery at your fingertips. It's time to recognize your photography for what it truly is: a form of art that you can excel in, one frame at a time.

7. Photography allows us to express ourselves



Our images can express joy and sorrow, wonder and sympathy. Every human emotion can find a place in photography.

For many years, I never valued my photographs of overcast landscapes, because I believed there was no beauty in a land with muted colors and a leaden sky. I wanted the

land to be alive with color and vibrancy.

However, the lack of color in a landscape makes you search for other things that often go unnoticed in bright sunlight. This could be the symmetry of hills or a tree standing out from a forest of thousands.

To expand this further:

I have suffered from depression for most of my adult life, and photography gives me a language to express feelings for which I can find no words. We have a miserably poor vocabulary for mental illness, but photography has allowed me to develop a visual language for some of my most difficult emotions.

Relatedly, the act of taking photos can be therapeutic. By focusing through the lens, you become an observer of your own emotions. You get a chance to work through feelings you might not even know you had.

Great art often stems from vulnerability. When you use photography to express your true self, you join a rich lineage of artists who have turned to their craft for emotional release. From heart-wrenching photojournalism to evocative portraits, these pieces resonate because they come from a place of sincere emotion.

So go ahead, pick up your camera and shoot not just what you see, but also what you feel. It's more than a snapshot; it's a fragment of your emotions frozen in time. Through your photos, you can share your inner world, making connections that words alone could never forge.

8. Photography has the power to move us



Photographs can grab our attention and speak directly to our emotions. There are plenty of powerful photos – such as Nick Ut’s photograph of a crying Vietnamese girl whose clothes have been burned away by napalm – that can make us *feel* things.

On a more subtle level, photography teaches us lessons about a whole range of emotions. Grief has the power to wash away the brightness and color of our lives. There is no magic way to restore these. We have to be patient. But while waiting, we can search for the shapes and patterns that are still present in the grayness. They will lead us back to color eventually. During moments of great sorrow in my life, I have used images to express that hope of returning color.

Photography, at its best, is a powerful language that speaks to our emotions. It allows us to tell our story and shows others our framing of the world around us.

9. Photography can change the world



A single photo can stir the conscience of its viewers, incite action, and even alter the course of history. It's not just art or a form of self-expression; it's also an agent of change. Your camera can be a powerful ally in shedding light on issues that matter, both globally and right in your community.

Consider the impact of photojournalism. Images of war, poverty, and social injustice have moved entire generations to take action. These photos put faces and stories to the issues we hear about, making them feel more real, more urgent. Yet, you don't have to travel to a war zone to make a difference. Everyday struggles in your own community are equally deserving of attention.

Let's say there's a park in your hometown threatened by development. A well-timed photo capturing the park's natural beauty could rally your neighbors to its defense. Or perhaps you're passionate about animal welfare. Your poignant images of shelter animals can encourage others to adopt or donate.

Photography has the power to go beyond mere observation and step into the realm of advocacy. Just like Ansel Adams used his camera to safeguard Yosemite, you can use

yours to protect and highlight what you care about. The scope doesn't have to be grand; the act of drawing attention is often enough to ignite change.

Whether it's a social issue or an environmental cause, don't underestimate the impact your photos can make. You're not just a bystander; you're a participant in shaping the world's narrative. So pick up that camera and shoot with purpose, for your lens could very well be the catalyst the world needs.

Why photography matters: final words



Hopefully, you now have a better sense of the different reasons people pursue photography – and why photography is important. The reasons to pick up a camera are as diverse as the people behind the lens. Yet, the common thread weaving through every shot is the profound impact photography can have. It's not just a hobby or a skill to master; it's a journey that enriches your life and, quite possibly, the lives of others.

Photography captures more than moments; it captures emotions, realities, and ideas. It offers a unique blend of technical skill and artistic expression, inviting you to continually evolve. Every time you click that shutter, you're participating in a form of storytelling that's been embraced by humanity for over a century.

So, whether you're aiming your camera at a sprawling landscape, a bustling cityscape, or the eyes of someone you love, remember this: each shot you take adds value to your life and potentially the lives of others. The importance of photography is far-reaching, and its impact is immeasurable.

Now I'd love to know:

Why do *you* do photography? What motivates you to keep taking pictures? What is it about photography that inspires you?

Share your thoughts in the comments below!

Declan O'Neill is a professional photographer who lives in the South Island, New Zealand. He travels extensively, capturing the beauty of New Zealand's extraordinary landscape. The photographs that accompany this article are part of a series entitled "The Anatomy of Melancholy," which is dedicated to the memory of his sister, Ann, who died from Multiple Systems Atrophy.