

Back to the garden

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I always have difficulty blogging and engaging in social media during a tragedy. My feelings run deep, and I can rarely sum them up in 140 characters without feeling trite. The perpetual heartache from the ISIS attacks in these weeks have hampered my ability to be pithy and clever in a status update.

Thank God the book is not dead, because through the pages my worry takes on long-form. I read books to escape, and write them unravel complications. The tome becomes a yarn that takes time to unsnarl. Books have taken up a great deal of my cognitive energy during this time of global tragedies, as our country tries to remember who we are, as a nation of immigrants. My attention turns to dystopian novels, as they set up alternative visions of the future.

I watched the final installment of the [Hunger Games](#), the adaptation of [Suzanne Collins's trilogy](#) that uses a modern vision of Rome to explore the many facets of violence, consumerism, entertainment and inequality. Not to be a spoiler, but the last scene was a comfort. It was a return to Eden, the garden where innocence is born. It was a reminder that even if everything that we have built crumbles in a heap of global-warmed, war-torn rubble, the garden persists.

People often say that we are destroying our planet. That is certainly true, but then I see how plants peak through the cracks in the pavement and tree trunks melt over concrete sidewalks, and I'm reminded of our relentless mother nature. We are destroying ourselves, as we prize suburban lawns over the survival of bees. But after we are gone, nature will grow up through the cracks and continue to flourish as surely as kudzu. Then the tree will still fall in the forest, whether we are there to hear it or not.

I remember the first time I imagined a return to the garden. We were in DC, living above our means, trying to manage inside the beltway on two pastors' salaries. I was supplementing our income with writing and speaking. Then the financial

meltdown took place and instability rocked us. How would we make it if one of us lost a job? And then, I realized that we lived on land. We could expand our gardens and eat from them. Everything else felt extraneous, as long as we could consume our lawn. Cell phones, cable, cars, computers, and our mountain of *stuff*—I could live without all of it. With the help of [Bill McKibben's thinking](#), I began to imagine a world with local economies, where we understood our reliance on the land again. Of course, life went on after the financial meltdown. Churches adjusted to smaller stock portfolios and no one lost jobs in our family.

In this midst of the ISIS attacks, it's hard to know how we will respond. We have a couple of avenues in our collective dystopian imaginations. We have the urge to build walls and defenses, to hoard our resources, and to keep out the "other," like we do in our zombie movies. ([Kelly J. Baker writes and thinks about this a lot.](#))

We have the genetically modified future, set out by Margaret Atwood's [Maddaddam trilogy](#).

Or we can answer Suzanne Collins, calling us back to the garden, and heed Atwood's other reminder that God is Green, as she woos us to tend bees and provide sanctuary as a sacred act of creation.

We know that paradise was lost in our biblical accounts, but they don't have stay unrecovered as we imagine our futures. Can we envision a future back in that garden, before we paved paradise? Or will we cut ourselves off from one another, building walls, hoarding and protecting what is ours? We have important choices before us. What will we choose?