

Service Overview

Speaker: Kathy Bates

Sermon Series: At The Table With One Another

Message: Authenticity

Scripture Reference: Ephesians 4: 18-24

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Service Welcome *Speaker: Worship Team*

Good morning and welcome to Parramatta Baptist Church. It's great to have you here worshipping with us, be that in person or joining us on our livestream.

I'm going to read some verses from Psalm 100. It's a psalm of praise. *"Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good, and his love endures forever. His faithfulness continues through all generations."*

Do we know that to be true? That the Lord is good? His love endures forever. His faithfulness continues through all generations. Let's stand and sing together if you're able to and worship our good God.

Worship Singing

Song: God Is So Good (You Are Worthy) by Ben Smith, Daniel Bashta, Pat Barrett

Song: Goodness Of God by Ben Fielding, Brian Johnson, Ed Cash, Jason Ingram, Jenn Johnson

Song: Shoulders by Luke Smallbone, Joel Smallbone, Ben Glover, Tedd Tjornhom

Song: Behold The Lamb by Kristian Stanfill, Melodie Malone, Phil Wickham

Introduction, Announcements & Upcoming Events *Speaker: Reuben*

Reuben: Thank you, Lord, for your goodness, for your sacrifice. We thank you for what you're doing in our lives and what you're about to do next. So come, Lord Jesus, we invite you to speak clearly into our hearts as you transform us more into your likeness. And all God's people say Amen.

Welcome to PBC. A big, warm welcome to those joining us online as well. Before we send the kids out, I just want to remind us that the kids holiday program will be from the 9th to the 12th of July for Kindergarten to Year 6. So if you have any neighbours, friends or family that you'd like to invite, please do so.

Jemima*: Hi, I'm Jemima, Reuben's wife, as you probably picked up if you don't know me. I just wanted to share quickly about a new women's group that I'm really excited about, that's going to start just the other side of the school holidays, that you'll see on the slide.

I'm calling it Navigating Neurodivergence. This is for mums, grandmas, maybe aunties or other significant carers of kids who have ADHD or autism. It's not just that either, it also encompasses sensory issues, anxiety, or other developmental issues. This group is really about just creating connection and a supportive group to journey that lonely road together.

Our daughter had an autism diagnosis about two years ago, and that has opened up our world. I think I spent the first 6 to 12 months looking at myself and my whole family and everyone connected to us, reevaluating our brains and learning more about our daughter and how she functions and what support she needs.

And what I found in that time is just connecting with other people, other mums, especially me as a mum, who are joining a kind of similar path. We often carry this quite silently. Our kids can carry it quite silently. There's a lot of masking that can happen. And you get home, and the door closes after school or after church or whatever, and everything kind of can fall apart, or you don't even get out the door because their socks are too bumpy or there's anxiety or whatever it is.

So I just want to say I see you if that's you. Yeah, it's really my heart just to create a space where we can connect and encourage each other. So this meeting is on Monday the 29th of July, and is a bit of a pilot to kickstart the idea and just see what it might look like to start to create community around this.

I'm really excited because we've got a wonderful, psychologist who is also a mum of neurodivergent kids and neurodivergent herself, Joanna Bailey, from Blue Bird Psychology. She's coming to help get the conversation going and help us come up with ideas for how this group can work. She'll be sharing and, yeah, tea and treats will be provided.

So, if you're interested, you can scan the QR code that's just on the slide, or there's a link in the newsletter, or just come and talk to me. And there's a little form to express your interest, even if you know, you can't come on that that day. I'd love to hear from you if you want to tap in and find out more.

Reuben: Thank you, Jemima. There are many ways to serve at PBC, and we've been doing a series recently about seeing other people the way Jesus sees them, serving one another, welcoming and including them. And so, there's a whole variety of ways you can serve on different ministry teams.

And we would like to highlight the need for more welcomers. There's, you know, this little illustration that we did earlier really shows the importance of just making that connection with people, people who are really looking for someone to talk to, or who have never stepped into a church before. I know that there are few around. And so, there's many ways to serve.

I know we've already summarised many of the roles. There's also the park ministry that we don't see directly within the church, but it is a ministry to the homeless who are sleeping rough at Prince Alfred Park in Parramatta. And another bit of information about the worship team. We're down by three keyboard players this month (or this season, we sound more like a footy team), with injuries, back injuries, tendon issues and a broken thumb. So there's a real need. And if you can't play or sing, please pray for us every week.

You know, there's many different things that can happen. And so, we really appreciate your prayer, but with relation to serving, if you're already serving, please do fill up the unavailability dates via the survey. There's a QR code for that. There's also the newsletter that will have a link for you. And also, a reminder that if you are serving in this church, you must fill out the screening forms and the code of conduct forms. They're absolutely essential to serving in this church.

Also, there will be a short church meeting at 12:15 PM after the service today. We will be passing one resolution with regards to the lease of the childcare centre on our grounds. So if you are a member of the church, please come. Everyone else is welcome to, but especially for members, we will need to pass this resolution.

And finally, I want to talk a little bit about the new ministry hub. And so as many of you will know, we have had our plans approved for the new ministry centre. Council approval is a really big deal for those of you who are familiar with the process, so that's amazing. And before we commence the building, we will need to set a target. We have set a target of raising \$1.3 million, and that's a really huge amount in human terms.

So we are really looking for people who are committed to praying about this, to pray for generosity, and for God's provision in for this project. We're really outgrowing this church, which is amazing. So if you are willing to regularly pray over the next six months about this funding, please, write it down on a response or come and speak to Steve or Kathy today. We'll update you, send prayer updates via email and share anything that God is saying about this upcoming project. So your prayers are always appreciated across all the ministries.

Bible Reading: Ephesians 4: 18-24 (NIV UK)

18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Sermon: At The Table We Find Restoration - Authenticity *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Hello everyone. Welcome, My name is Kathy, and I'm one of the pastors here. It's really good to have you here. As we continue our series today, how about we join together for a moment and just position our hearts to receive from God.

God, we just want to thank you so much for your word. Lord, we just thank you for the ways that you speak into our lives, for the ways that your holy Spirit brings your word to life in timely ways for us. And so I want to thank you, Lord, that through your Word, we are continuing to be made into your likeness, Jesus. And I pray, Jesus, would you position us right now to hear the things that you want to say? In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, for those who might be new or visiting this year, we, have been doing a series on 'the table' across the year. We began Term 1 talking about being at the table with Jesus. This table with Jesus is a place where we are fully present as we spend time with the Lord. And then in Term 2, we have shifted into being at the table with one another. And we have talked already about knowing that we belong at the table. This means we put away the narratives when, you know, when we walk into a church context and say, 'I don't really belong here, I don't really fit here.' We put all of that away, and we know that we belong at this table.

And then we have been talking about postures that we bring to the table. And so the posture of serving the other, of seeing the other, of welcoming and including the other. And today we are talking about the posture of being authentic at the table. Now, as we talk about authenticity, just so that we're on the same page, I just thought we might just break into groups of 2 or 3 and just share briefly. What do you understand that it means to be authentic with one another? What does it mean to be authentic?

Because there's nothing worse than doing a whole sermon on a word where someone goes, 'I didn't even know what they're talking about.' If you need to do a sneaky Google search, you're welcome to do that. What does it mean to be authentic? Jump into groups and have a very quick chat.

--- Break as congregation forms small groups to discuss ---

I just want to flag for the introverts in the room, we're going to have a number of points where we break into discussion groups through this message.

What does it mean to be authentic? Who had ideas around this? Be real. Be genuine. Be consistent. Be true. You guys have nailed it. You know, one of my observations in recent years is that being real or being authentic or being true to yourself has become a really, really important part of our culture. I'm not talking about culture within our church. I'm talking about broader culture, and particularly for our younger generations coming through. This is really, really a thing.

Also, I love spending time with young adults. And one of the things that's really amused me, actually, is their push back on the carefully crafted images on social media. We kind of share ourselves on social media, but often that image is my 'best self.' The photo on the slide is me when I was at a wedding, you know, and I looked really fantastic. It's not me when I was just up in the morning or whatever.

Anyway, so there's a Be Real app this year that some of our young adults have jumped into. Has anyone seen this or is part of even that Be Real app? Anyway, the Be Real app is this push back on the carefully crafted social media images. This app will notify you randomly at any point through the day, and you have two minutes to take a photo of whatever you're doing, wherever you are, however you look, and your phone not only takes a photo of the front of the screen, what's before you, but also takes a photo back of you. So whatever you are, this is the real you. This whole 'be real' thing is it is actually just a bit to be real, to be authentic, to not do the carefully crafted, edited versions of ourselves.

Can I just say that for those of us who follow Jesus, or who are exploring what it means to follow Jesus, authenticity has another layer, more than just simply displaying the unedited version of yourself. You know, whilst I applaud this bit to be real, it's actually more than this. And so today we're going to explore three biblical facets of authenticity for those of us who are seeking to follow Jesus.

How does the Bible inform what being authentic with one another might look like? And how might our authenticity within a community of believers differ from the way that our broader culture is defining authenticity in 2024? So we're going to talk about three biblical perspectives.

I am a work in progress. You are a work in progress, and sincerity matters. Firstly, I am a work in progress. Now to visualize this, because you know that I'm a visual person, I want you to imagine that our life is on a continuum across the front of this platform. And so down this end is our self, before we came to know Christ.

The Apostle Paul calls this our old nature. It's characterised by our old self that does whatever it pleases, to gratify its own desires. Lydia*, who was our children's pastor, I remember once giving a children's talk, and she defined our old nature as the 'selfish me, me'. And, I don't know, but I just love that myself and Steve often use that expression in our home, 'the selfish me, me', because I think I just think it sums it up well.

You know, we are living before we come to know Christ. We only have that (the selfish me, me) to live out if we live for ourselves, without Jesus as Lord. But in Romans 6, Paul says that when we committed our lives to Christ, there was an exchange. We died to our old nature and we were given a new nature in Christ. And so Paul says in Romans 6: 6, *'we know that our old self was crucified with Jesus, so that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.'*

And he goes on to say in verse 11, 'count yourselves dead to sin in Christ Jesus.' So those who follow Jesus don't live down this end of the continuum. To the Ephesians who had chosen to follow Jesus, Paul writes in Ephesians 4:17, *'don't live as the gentiles do,'* live no longer as the Gentiles do. And in the context that Paul was writing in Ephesus, gentiles were defined as those who hadn't chosen to follow Jesus. They only had their old nature to live out of.

And so, in our context now, you know, if we were to translate what's going on here in Ephesians, Paul is saying, live no longer as those who don't yet have a new nature do. And Paul goes on to explain, why not? Why aren't you to live like them?

--- Break as Ephesians 4:18-24 is read ---

So on our continuum, we have died to our old nature and we have been given a new nature in Christ. And so we have been propelled on this continuum. And so down the other end is Jesus himself. And when we die to our old nature and are given a new nature, we begin becoming like Jesus. This is the destination that we're heading toward.

But along this process of this continuum, we are a work in progress, right? We die to our old nature. We're becoming like Jesus, but we're not there yet. We're a work in progress. And so with this biblical framework in mind, let's have a think about what authenticity is and isn't. If authenticity is being real or genuine, what does being a work in progress mean for us? Being real or genuine with one another?

I have given this some thought and I have three thoughts about this. Firstly, authenticity isn't pretending that I am better than I am. It's not pretending that I've already got this spiritual life down pat or that I have made it.

Paul says in Philippians 3 (and he's talking about becoming like Christ), *'not that I've already obtained all this or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of it.'* So he's not there yet. But what I'd love you to do in discussion groups is just have a little bit of a chat about what might happen in a community if people were to act like they had already become fully like Jesus. So if they're like, 'I've got it all together,' what impact might that have on other people in the community? right.

--- Break as congregation forms small groups to discuss ---

What potentially might happen in a community if people pretend that they've already arrived spiritually? What kind of impact might that have on other people in the church community? 'I'm struggling, you're not going to understand me, and you're going to judge me because of it', 'grace has no place of if you've already got it together', 'you struggle alone', 'there's no help', 'it discredits Jesus', 'we miss out on community because we're not real with each other', 'it creates an exclusion

zone for those who are struggling,' 'hypocrisy', 'you don't want to go to a church that's like that.' So that's one of my observations, about this continuum, is that we don't pretend that we've already arrived.

The second insight that I had about this continuum is that authenticity is about being real about the gains and the losses of being a work in progress. And so, you know, there are gains, right? As we inch our way along this continuum of becoming like Jesus, our character is being transformed, right? We are not the same people that we were when we first came to Christ. He is transforming and bearing fruit in us as we seek to be obedient to Christ as we are in His Word and allowing His Word to change us as we walk in step with the Holy Spirit. Increasingly, we're inching our way along this continuum. So there are gains.

A couple of weeks ago, Steve and I, we caught up with our best friends of 30 years, and we went for a walk. We were reminiscing because this is our 30th year of friendship, and we were reminiscing about the fact that we've been friends for so long that we have seen the good, the bad and the ugly in each other. And we were reminiscing about some of the ugly, and we were having a bit of a laugh about. You know, 'remember that time when the wheels fell off', but we just had this little poignant moment where we just went, 'you know, we've changed a lot in the last 30 years.'

And it's not that we've arrived yet by any stretch, but each of us can say as we follow Jesus, we are not who we were when we first met, either. We have been inching our way along, so we're authentic with one another about the gains. As a community, we give God glory with the work that he's doing in our lives, but we're also championing others in what he's doing in their life as well, pointing out where we see change in others, actually being able to encourage and speaking to that.

But of course, our Christian life is not all gains for all of us. There are losses as well. Times when we fail. Paul says in in Romans 6 that we died to our old self when we came to Christ. But then in chapter 7, he goes on to acknowledge that there'll still be a sin battle for all of us. And he names his own battle with sin. He says, *'I want to do what is right, but I can't, and I want to do what is good, but I don't do it, and I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.'* And I think this pretty much sums up how it is some days for all of us, right?

We just don't get it right. The Holy Spirit definitely empowers us, and there are gains as we learn to live and love like Jesus. But there are also many times where we mess up. Authenticity is being real and humble about the times when we mess up. It's saying sorry to the people who were affected and also to God. It's being real about our struggles with one another, with people who will pick us up rather than judge us, will pick us up and point us in the direction of Jesus.

If any of us are stuck in habitual patterns of sin, it's actually having a safe place and knowing that we can be real about that and getting prayer into that space, getting whatever help is needed in that space so that we can break those patterns of addictive sin and journey to being like Christ.

So again, I have a discussion question for you. What might happen in a church if people are real about the gains and losses that we've just spoken about? How might that benefit both ourselves and also others? What happens if we're real about the gains and losses? Have a quick chat.

--- Break as congregation forms small groups to discuss ---

How did you go? What might happen in a church if people are real about the gains and the losses? How might it benefit us and others as well? 'It will become an attractive place for people', 'people are drawn to what is real', 'provides an example of what being real looks like', 'it's a safe place', 'sharing losses and gains gives people hope that God can work the same way in them', 'it's invitational'.

You know, I just want to say it takes a lot of courage to be real, and I do want to acknowledge that. Brené Brown, who's a pretty famous psychologist, says, 'when someone dares to be authentic in showing their weakness, it permissions us to be imperfect,' she says. I love it. Everyone loves it. Yet, she says, 'no one wants to be the person who goes first.' Is that not true? And yet, I think in this place of authenticity, we do need to have the courage to be the person who goes first, to be real.

Well, the third way that this continuum of our Christian life also informs this place of authenticity is that we keep our eye on the end goal. You know, my goal in becoming authentic is not simply to be true to myself. My goal is to become like Jesus. And so, as tempting as it might be to make peace with that favourite sin, or to embrace it as if it's just part of me, and you are to celebrate the real me, because this is the real, broken, sinful me, you celebrate me.

Instead of that, we're keeping our eye on that no, this that's not what this is about. This is about becoming like Jesus. And as tempting as it might be to settle short, sometimes I think particularly as we get older, as Christians, we can settle short on this continuum, on this journey of becoming like Jesus.

You know, we kind of reach a place of not really leaning in on what the word is saying and how the Holy Spirit is seeking to transform the minutia of our character. You know, we're cooperating with the things that God is putting his finger on, and allowing him to transform us so that this year I can look back and go, actually, this has shifted. I'm not the same in that anymore. I'm not the same person I was a year ago. We can settle short.

And so this place of being on this continuum and knowing this is the goal keeps us ever moving forward. In Hebrews 12, Paul says, (I love this, because he urges us to keep looking ahead), *'let us throw off everything, every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up, and let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us.'* And he says, *'we do this by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is both the initiator of our faith, and he's also the perfecter of our faith.'*

So we keep our eyes there. My observation in our Western culture in recent years, is that we have embraced authenticity as one of the highest values. Be true to yourself is our cultural narrative. And I just want to say I'm really, really supportive of being real. It's just that as followers of Jesus, being real isn't an end in of itself.

It is not the goal, but rather being real helps us realise the goal of becoming like Jesus. It's when I'm real about the fact that I have fallen short of God's standards, that I'm then able to receive Jesus' grace. It's when I'm real about the ongoing struggles that I have with sin that I'm then able to make change. It's when I'm real with others that I learn, as we have said, that I'm not alone, but I have friends who will care and who pray and who will champion me to become like Jesus.

So as followers of Jesus, we don't celebrate the parts of us that that fall short of who God has created us to be, as if we have discovered our true self. Nor do we hide those parts. But rather as followers of Jesus, authenticity accepts that we are a work in progress and we are in this lifelong process of becoming more and more like Jesus.

So again, I said before, we have three biblical perspectives. So the first is, 'I'm a work in progress.' The second really follows on from this. If I'm a work in progress, you are also a work in progress. We're just going to cover these next two perspectives quite briefly. But what I'd love you to do with this one, if I'm a work in progress and you're a work in progress, what difference will that perspective make in our relationships in the church, if we understand we're all a work in progress here?

--- Break as congregation forms small groups to discuss ---

All right. I know some of these you've touched on already. But what difference does it make if I'm a work in progress? And I understand that you're a work in progress. We're each on the same page of going. We're all a work in progress here. What difference does that make to our relationships in the church? 'As you communicate from a more empathetic point of view, you go 'I get that, I understand what it is to struggle, and I'm not going to judge you for that', 'it's easier to forgive when you understand another's struggles and recognise that you mess up as well', 'don't put leaders on a pedestal and expect them to be perfect, they're also a work in progress', 'don't compare yourself to others', 'we're all children of God, learning in this place together', 'be able to playful and laugh at yourself when you make a mistake'.

So I said, there are three ways that the Bible informs our authenticity. I'm a work in progress. You're a work in progress. And the final point I really want to touch on briefly is just sincerity matters. Authenticity doesn't fake interest or care for one another. It doesn't present one way to your face and then something else behind your back.

In Romans 12, Paul says, *'that our love for one another is to be sincere.'* And when Paul wrote this, he actually used a phrase in Greek that said 'sincere love.' And so he almost wrote this like a title. And then he went on to describe what sincere love looks like. And so he says, sincere love is devoted to one another. It carries the idea of commitment. And I think there's an acknowledgment in this that relationships can be hard work at times.

And so we we're all in on relationships. We're devoted to one another. We're not going to give up easily. Sincere love is humble, and it honours others above ourselves. So we honour rather than criticise others. Why? Because we know we're all a work in progress, right? No one gets it right all the time. Sincere love is spiritually fervent. As we serve the Lord, we see what we do as an act of love for God.

And so we we're not coming from a focus of 'what does this do for me?', but rather, 'what does this do for you?' as I serve. Sincere love is generous and shares what we have in practising hospitality. Sincere love, as we've said already, is empathic. Paul says, *'rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.'* I reckon that's the reality of life.

As a pastor, I get to hear people's stories all the time, and I reckon the reality of life for the majority of us is that life is stressful and it's anxious. There is lots that goes on for each of us in our own little personal spheres, but being empathic says, 'I'm not just going to stay in my own little sphere, I'm actually going to stretch myself to think about what might be going on in your sphere. How can I be considerate of what's happening for you and be alongside you in what's happening for you?', as we have capacity to do that.

Paul also says, finally, that sincere love overcomes evil with good. And so this is really about where we get hurt. And so it's about blessing those who speak ill of us, choosing to forgive differences, as far as that is possible. He says, *'make every effort to live in harmony.'* Can I just say that this sincere love, peace, is a significant part of what it means to have forward momentum in this place of becoming like Jesus? Because Jesus said the two most important things that we were to do is to love God and to love one another.

And so as we're practicing sincere love, we're actually becoming more like Jesus as we do that. As we finish today, it's really my prayer that we just consider our own authenticity. And then I just really want to encourage us to keep growing in authenticity, in whatever place that this lands for you. But I am a work in progress. You are a work in progress, and our sincerity with one another matters.

On the night that I wrote this, Steve and I had some people of peace, friends, around our table. And our friend said to us at one point in the meal, he said, 'I'd really like to grow more spiritual.' And knowing that he has no faith background, I said, 'oh, that's the really interesting thing to say. Why would you say that?' And he said, 'because all the spiritual people I know are kind, and I really like the values, and I want to learn about that.'

And I feel like as we had that conversation, I just felt like God is wanting to encourage us that when we come to the table with each other with authenticity, knowing that we come in this posture of serving and including the others, that it not only then becomes a table that we want to belong to, but it actually becomes a table where our people of peace also want to come and belong. It's a distinct place. Let's be increasingly those kinds of people.

Post-Sermon Prayer *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Lord God, I just want to thank you that you have transformed us. I just want to pray for any who might be here today who may not yet have committed themselves to you, Jesus, and who find themselves still living out of their old nature.

God, I want to pray that today might be the day where old nature is set aside, and Lord, where those people might choose to commit themselves to you, to begin this life journey of becoming like Jesus. And Lord God, I want to pray for those of us who have committed ourselves to you. Lord, I pray that you will fill us afresh with Your Holy Spirit.

I pray that it will be us in your word, cooperating with Your Holy Spirit's presence in us, that would give us courage to keep taking steps to be more like you, Jesus. And I pray, Lord God, that we would be real in that process. I pray that we would encourage one another and be gracious and kind to one another in that process as well.

Lord, I pray that Parramatta Baptist Church will indeed continue to be marked by grace and acceptance, as well as the seal of continually becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. We bless you, Lord God. Amen.

Worship Singing

Song: This Is Our God by Reuben Morgan

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Reuben*

Thank you, Lord, for opening up our hearts and revealing your heart for us. Let us be transformed more and more into your likeness. Lord, would you have your way? Would you change us? You've given us a new nature. So refresh our hearts, our minds and our bodies as we go forth and to stay close to you and dependent on you.

Lord, that we look out for others and be vulnerable as you lead us on. So may the Lord bless us and bless you, lead you on and show his face to you that he may really shine his glory upon all of us as we reflect his radiance. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

Conclusion *Speaker: Reuben*

This morning, if you want to respond to the word that Kathy just gave, I just want to invite you forward for a time of prayer. If that impacted you, come and stand with someone, and they will be more than happy to just stand in agreement with you. And very shortly after, we'll have our church meeting as well. Bless you all. Have a great week.

Online Outro *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Hey, thank you for joining us online today. We pray that you have been blessed and encouraged. And if there is something from today that you would like us to pray into with you, don't hesitate to let us know.

If we haven't met you, we'd love to hear from you. And you also welcome to come and join us in person as well. To know more about our church, please go to our church website and you can also find more details about who we are through our newsletter. And you can subscribe to that through our website as well.

God bless you and may you have a great week.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*